



Washington State Fusion Center INFOCUS

WEDNESDAY — 2 FEB 2022



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HEADLINE	02/01 Record number quit jobs in 2021
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SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/02/01/economy/us-job-openings-quite-december/index.html
GIST	<p>New York (CNN Business)Last year was a historic one for American jobs. A record number of workers quit their jobs while US employers had more positions to fill than ever before.</p> <p>In December, 4.3 million Americans quit their jobs, down slightly from the record 4.5 million in November, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported Friday.</p> <p>While millions of workers left jobs for cash incentives, better pay or better benefits, people also left the labor market to care for children or elderly relatives during the pandemic. Meanwhile, older workers retired early either because they could or because age discrimination forced them out of the labor market.</p> <p>The number of workers quitting last month fell in health care and social assistance jobs, as well as restaurants, hotels and construction. Quits went up in nondurable good manufacturing.</p> <p>Even though a record number of people quit their jobs last year, the US labor market still recorded a net employment gain of 6.4 million.</p> <p>In total, 75.3 million workers were hired last year, while 68.9 million quit, were laid off or discharged. Out of these so-called separations, 47.4 million were voluntary quits.</p> <p>In line with that, the number of layoffs hit a new record low at 1.2 million in December, showing that the negative impact from the Omicron variant didn't fully hit the labor market at the end of last year.</p> <p>Job openings stood at 10.9 million in December, compared with the data series high of 11.1 million recorded in July.</p> <p>Worker shortage continues</p> <p>For US companies, the labor shortage is still as real as it was in the summer. Home Depot (HD) has a plan to address the challenge: speedy job offers.</p> <p>The world's largest home improvement retailer said Tuesday that job applicants "could receive an offer within one day of applying."</p> <p>Home Depot said the "accelerated" hiring process is part of its plan to hire more than 100,000 new associates ahead of its busy spring season.</p> <p>"In today's climate, jobseekers are shopping for the best opportunity," Eric Schelling, Home Depot's vice president of global talent acquisition, said in a statement.</p> <p>To attract workers, Home Depot said it offers jobseekers various incentives, including upskilling programs, tuition reimbursement, a cash bonus program and discounted stock purchases.</p> <p>The pandemic has forced a rethinking of how we work. A new study released Tuesday by the University of Michigan shows college-educated workers prioritize work passion over financial security, forcing companies to reassess what they offer their employees.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/02 Buildup of Russia military around Ukraine
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/02/02/europe/russia-troops-ukraine-buildup-satellite-images-intl/index.html
GIST	<p>Zaporozhzia, Ukraine (CNN)More evidence has emerged of a steady build-up of Russian military equipment and deployments around Ukraine, with new satellite images revealing a further expansion of the military presence at multiple locations in Belarus, Crimea and western Russia.</p> <p>Russian forces have moved into Belarus in the last two weeks. The Russian and Belarus defense ministries say the deployments are ahead of a major training exercise this month.</p>

The imagery was collected and analyzed by Maxar. In an accompanying note, Maxar said the deployments "reflect an increased level of activity and readiness."

Maxar and other satellite imagery providers said they have noticed the expansion of existing Russian military training grounds and garrisons within some 150 miles of the Ukrainian border over the last few months.

Some are within a few miles of the border.

Maxar said the most recent images show a new phase of Russian activity.

It said that previously, "in most cases, few troops or new housing for additional personnel were observed near the deployments, suggesting that some of the units may have been pre-positioned or forward deployed."

That has begun to change.

"During the past couple of weeks, several new significant military deployments have been observed in Belarus," Maxar said.

"Also, troop tents/shelters for personnel have been seen at virtually every deployment location in Belarus, Crimea and western Russia, which suggests that the units are now accompanied with troops and have increased their overall readiness level."

Maxar compared images from September and late January of the same military camp at Novoozerne in Crimea. The images show a significant increase in activity, with an area of tents being erected.

That implies the camp is ready to house troops, although there is no evidence of troops arriving as of now.

Maxar also note that "local military training activity (including live-fire artillery and maneuver training) has been observed in progress at numerous training areas."

The imagery shows impact craters at two training areas in Russia: Pogonovo and Persianovsky. Persianovsky is some 30 miles (50 kilometers) from the Ukrainian border. Pogonovo is some 150 miles (220 kilometers) from the border.

Konrad Muzyka, a defense analyst focusing on Russia and Belarus at Rochan Consulting, an aerospace and defense consultancy, said he believes there are now between 74 and 76 Russian battalion tactical groups (BTGs) ranged around Ukraine.

Battalion tactical groups typically comprise of about 1,000 soldiers, along with support units.

Muzyka says that since the first week of January, Russia has been moving its forces from the Eastern Military District -- thousands of miles away in Siberia -- to Western Russia and Belarus.

"The size of this deployment is significant, perhaps as many as 15-20 BTGs," Muzyka [wrote in a note](#).

He also said that Russian Ground Forces have deployed units that include Iskander short-range ballistic missiles to Belarus and parts of Russia close to Ukraine. He calculates there are at least 48 launchers near Ukraine.

While Russian capabilities and movements can often be observed, the Kremlin's intentions are much more difficult to read. US President Joe Biden said last week that an [invasion of Ukraine](#) in February is "a distinct possibility."

	<p>UK Foreign Secretary Liz Truss has said that "it is highly likely that [President Putin] is likely to invade Ukraine."</p> <p>"There is a real threat of invasion, but we don't know what's going to happen," she told the BBC on January 30.</p> <p>The Kremlin has consistently denied that it has any plans to invade Ukraine.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/02 Oil prices high, will they stay that way?
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/02/business/economy/oil-price.html
GIST	<p>HOUSTON — Oil prices are increasing, again, casting a shadow over the economy, driving up inflation and eroding consumer confidence.</p> <p>Crude prices rose more than 15 percent in January alone, with the global benchmark price crossing \$90 a barrel for the first time in more than seven years, as fears of a Russian invasion of Ukraine grew.</p> <p>Though the summer driving season is still months away, the average price for regular gasoline is fast approaching \$3.40 a gallon, roughly a dollar higher than it was a year ago, according to AAA.</p> <p>The Biden administration said in November that it would release 50 million barrels of oil from the nation's strategic reserves to relieve the pressure on consumers, but the move hasn't made much of a difference.</p> <p>Many energy analysts predict that oil could soon touch \$100 a barrel, even as electric cars become more popular and the coronavirus pandemic persists. Exxon Mobil and other oil companies that only a year ago were considered endangered dinosaurs by some Wall Street analysts are thriving, raking in their biggest profits in years.</p> <p>Why are oil prices suddenly so high?</p> <p>The pandemic depressed energy prices in 2020, even sending the U.S. benchmark oil price below zero for the first time ever. But prices have snapped back faster and more than many analysts had expected in large part because supply has not kept up with demand.</p> <p>Western oil companies, partly under pressure from investors and environmental activists, are drilling fewer wells than they did before the pandemic to restrain the increase in supply. Industry executives say they are trying not to make the same mistake they made in the past when they pumped too much oil when prices were high, leading to a collapse in prices.</p> <p>Elsewhere, in countries like Ecuador, Kazakhstan and Libya, natural disasters and political turbulence have curbed output in recent months.</p> <p>"Unplanned outages have flipped what was thought to be a pivot towards surplus into a deep production gap," said Louise Dickson, an oil markets analyst at Rystad Energy, a research and consulting firm.</p> <p>On the demand side, much of the world is learning to cope with the pandemic and people are eager to shop and make other trips. Wary of coming in contact with an infectious virus, many are choosing to drive rather than taking public transportation.</p> <p>But the most immediate and critical factor is geopolitical.</p> <p>A potential Russian invasion of Ukraine has "the oil market on edge," said Ben Cahill, a senior fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington. "In a tight market, any significant disruptions could send prices well above \$100 per barrel," Mr. Cahill wrote in a report this week.</p>

Russia produces 10 million barrels of oil a day, or roughly one of every 10 barrels used around the world on any given day. Americans would not be directly hurt in a significant way if Russian exports stopped, because the country sends only about 700,000 barrels a day to the United States. That relatively modest amount could easily be replaced with oil from Canada and other countries.

But any interruption of Russian shipments that transit through Ukraine, or the sabotage of other pipelines in northern Europe, would cripple much of the continent and distort the global energy supply chain. That's because, traders say, the rest of the world does not have the spare capacity to replace Russian oil.

Even if Russian oil shipments are not interrupted, the United States and its allies could impose sanctions or export controls on Russian companies, limiting their access to equipment, which could gradually reduce production in that country.

In addition, interruptions of Russian natural gas exports to Europe could force some utilities to produce more electricity by burning oil rather than gas. That would raise demand and prices worldwide.

What can the United States and its allies do if Russian production is disrupted?

The United States, Japan, European countries and even China could release more crude from their strategic reserves. Such moves could help, especially if a crisis is short-lived. But the reserves would not be nearly enough if Russian oil supplies were interrupted for months or years.

Western oil companies that have pledged not to produce too much oil would most likely change their approach if Russia was unable or unwilling to supply as much oil as it did. They would have big financial incentives — from a surging oil price — to drill more wells. That said, it would take those businesses months to ramp up production.

What is OPEC doing?

President Biden has been urging the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries to pump more oil, but several members have been falling short of their monthly production quotas, and some may not have the capacity to quickly increase output. OPEC members and their allies, Russia among them, are meeting on Wednesday, and will probably agree to continue gradually increasing production.

In addition, if Russian supplies are suddenly reduced, Washington will most likely put pressure on Saudi Arabia to raise production independently of the cartel. Analysts think that the kingdom has several million barrels of spare capacity that it could tap in a crisis.

What impact would higher oil prices have on the U.S. economy?

A big jump in oil prices would push gasoline prices even higher, and that would hurt consumers. Working-class and rural Americans would be hurt the most because they tend to drive more. They also drive older, less fuel-efficient vehicles. And energy costs tend to represent a larger percentage of their incomes, so price increases hit them harder than more affluent people or city dwellers who have access to trains and buses.

But the direct economic impact on the nation would be more modest than in previous decades because the United States produces more and imports less oil since drilling in shale fields exploded around 2010 because of hydraulic fracturing. The United States is now a net exporter of fossil fuels, and the economies of several states, particularly Texas and Louisiana, could benefit from higher prices.

What would it take for oil prices to fall?

Oil prices go up and down in cycles, and there are several reasons prices could fall in the next few months. The pandemic is far from over, and China has shut down several cities to stop the spread of the virus, slowing its economy and demand for energy. Russia and the West could reach an agreement — formal or tacit — that forestalls a full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

And the United States and its allies could [restore a 2015 nuclear agreement with Iran](#) that former President Donald J. Trump abandoned. Such a deal would allow Iran to sell oil much more easily than now. Analysts think the country could export a million or more barrels daily if the nuclear deal is revived.

Ultimately, high prices could depress demand for oil enough that prices begin to come down. One of the main financial incentives for buying electric cars, for example, is that electricity tends to be cheaper per mile than gasoline. Sales of electric cars are growing fast in Europe and China and increasingly also in the United States.

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HEADLINE	02/02 UN: NKorea broke missile moratorium
SOURCE	https://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2022/02/02/Antonio-Guterres-North-Korea-ballistic-missile-moratorium-Hwasong-12/6361643784387/
GIST	<p>SEOUL, Feb. 2 (UPI) -- United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said that North Korea violated its self-imposed moratorium on long-range missile launches when it fired a ballistic missile capable of reaching the U.S. territory of Guam this weekend.</p> <p>Guterres condemned the test, saying it was "a breaking of the DPRK's announced moratorium in 2018 on launches of this nature, and a clear violation of Security Council resolutions," according to a statement by his spokesman released on Tuesday.</p> <p>The Democratic People's Republic of Korea is the official name of North Korea.</p> <p>"It is of great concern that the DPRK has again disregarded any consideration for international flight or maritime safety," Guterres added.</p> <p>He called on North Korea to "desist from taking any further counter-productive actions."</p> <p>Pyongyang's firing of a Hwasong-12 missile on Sunday marked its biggest weapons test since 2017 and came at the conclusion of a record month of launches under leader Kim Jong Un.</p> <p>North Korea conducted seven weapons tests during January, including an alleged hypersonic weapons system, train-fired ballistic missiles and long-range cruise missiles.</p> <p>Pyongyang declared a moratorium on intercontinental ballistic missile and nuclear weapons tests during a period of diplomatic detente in 2018, but Kim suggested earlier this month that he was ready to lift the ban in order to face "the hostile policy and military threat by the U.S."</p> <p>Analysts estimate that the Hwasong-12 has a range of roughly 2,800 miles, putting the U.S. territory of Guam within reach. North Korea has claimed that the missile is capable of carrying a nuclear warhead.</p> <p>U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken condemned the North's recent launches in a call with Japanese Foreign Minister Hayashi Yoshimasa on Tuesday.</p> <p>Dept. Secretary of State Wendy Sherman also held a call with her South Korean and Japanese counterparts on Tuesday. She "denounced the DPRK's recent and escalatory ballistic missile launches as violations of UN Security Council resolutions and destabilizing to the region," according to a readout.</p> <p>State Dept. spokesman Ned Price said on Monday that Washington is looking for ways to address the North Korea challenge diplomatically while also continuing to move forward "with different steps to hold the DPRK responsible and accountable."</p> <p>The Biden administration leveled sanctions on several individuals and entities tied to Pyongyang's illicit weapons program on Jan. 12 and later led a call for the U.N. Security Council to blacklist five North Koreans. That proposal was blocked by Russia and China, but the United States has requested another</p>

	closed-door Security Council meeting on Thursday over the Hwasong-12 launch, according to multiple reports.
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HEADLINE	02/02 DR Congo: militia attack kills 60
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/least-60-people-killed-militia-attack-eastern-congo-2022-02-02/
GIST	<p>BENI, Democratic Republic of Congo, Feb 2 (Reuters) - At least 60 people were killed in a militia attack on Wednesday morning at a displaced persons' camp in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, the head of a local humanitarian group and a witness said.</p> <p>Both sources told Reuters the CODECO militia was responsible for the killings, which took place about 0200 GMT at the Savo camp in Ituri province.</p> <p>CODECO fighters have killed hundreds of civilians in Ituri in recent years and forced thousands to flee their homes, according to the United Nations. Recent attacks have also targeted displaced persons camps.</p> <p>"I first heard cries when I was still in bed. Then several minutes of gunshots. I fled and I saw torches and people crying for help and I realized it was the CODECO militiamen who had invaded our site," said Lokana Bale Lussa, a camp resident.</p> <p>"We have counted more than 60 dead and (more) seriously injured," he said.</p> <p>Charite Banza Bavi, president of the local humanitarian group for the Bahema-North area, put the death toll at 63.</p> <p>The Savo displacement site was home to about 4,000 people in December, according to the U.N. migration agency.</p> <p>CODECO's fighters are drawn mainly from the Lendu farming community, which has long been in conflict with Hema herders.</p> <p>A government spokesman could not immediately be reached for comment.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/02 Tokyo daily infections hit all-time high
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/tokyos-daily-covid-19-infections-exceed-20000-first-time-2022-02-02/
GIST	<p>TOKYO, Feb 2 (Reuters) - Tokyo's new COVID-19 cases exceeded 20,000 for the first time on Wednesday, dimming hopes that an Omicron-fuelled wave of infections in Japan is peaking out.</p> <p>Nationwide cases reached a record 91,760, while 18 prefectures recorded all-time highs, according to a tally by online news service JX Press.</p> <p>Tokyo reported 21,576 new cases, exceeding the previous record of 17,631 in Japan's capital on Friday.</p> <p>The closely watched usage rate of hospital beds reserved for COVID-19 patients edged up to 51.4%. Officials previously said that a state of emergency would be needed if the rate reached 50%, but now say the decision will depend on the number of serious cases and other factors. read more</p> <p>The capital and most of Japan are now under curbs to contain spread of the virus, with the latest wave of infections fuelled by the highly transmissible Omicron variant.</p> <p>The western prefecture of Osaka reported 11,171 new infections, down from a record 11,881 on Tuesday.</p>

	Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirokazu Matsuno said on Wednesday the government is not planning to declare a state of emergency but remains vigilant.
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HEADLINE	02/02 Australia Covid hospital admissions fall
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/australias-covid-19-hospital-admissions-fall-lowest-weeks-2022-02-02/
GIST	<p>SYDNEY, Feb 2 (Reuters) - Australia's COVID-19 hospitalisation rate fell to its lowest in nearly three weeks on Wednesday, while a steady rate of daily infections raised hopes the worst of an outbreak fuelled by the Omicron coronavirus variant may have passed.</p> <p>Hospital cases fell to about 4,600 on Wednesday, with all states seeing a dip in admission numbers, after a peak of nearly 5,400 a week ago.</p> <p>"We've seen the peaks of Omicron, I think, come through in (New South Wales and Victoria)," Prime Minister Scott Morrison, who is under pressure over his handling of the Omicron wave, told a media briefing.</p> <p>With COVID-19 hospitalisations stabilising, Morrison said he had tasked health officials to check the impact on the health system before easing more border curbs. Morrison said last week he hoped international borders may fully reopen "before Easter".</p> <p>Australia is going through a staggered border reopening allowing in only skilled migrants, international students and backpackers.</p> <p>Airlines and tourism businesses, already battered by rounds of lockdowns over the past two years, are hoping for a quick re-opening to all tourists.</p> <p>Fuelled by fast-spreading Omicron, Australia's total infections surged over the past two months, most in its most populous states of New South Wales and Victoria, with about 2.3 million cases recorded.</p> <p>Until then, it had only detected some 200,000 infections since the pandemic began.</p> <p>About 8.2 million boosters have been administered as of Wednesday, shots for half of the eligible population, with authorities pressing people to get their third dose soon to mitigate the threat of severe illness from Omicron.</p> <p>New South Wales and South Australia said they would allow a staged return of non-urgent surgeries from Monday after hospitalisation rates steadied.</p> <p>On Wednesday, Australia reported 70 new deaths, down from a record of 98 set last Friday, and just over 40,000 new cases.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/01 Public schools lost 4% students since 2020
SOURCE	https://crosscut.com/news/2022/02/how-many-students-did-wa-public-schools-lose-during-pandemic
GIST	<p>Back in 2020, in the early days of the pandemic, as Washington state students started learning remotely, Jen Garrison Stuber's email blew up. Garrison Stuber is the advocacy chair of the Washington Homeschool Organization.</p> <p>"It went from three to 10 emails a day, to about 40," she said.</p>

While many were from parents worried about their school's sudden shift out of the classroom and into remote learning, plenty of other parents were weighing the option to make the jump to officially home-schooling.

In October 2020, about seven months after Washington schools first started remote learning in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, statewide public school enrollment had lost about 40,000 students, or about 4% of the more than a million children enrolled during the previous school year, according to [state data](#) from the Office of Financial Management.

The office that tracks all things related to the state budget also reported that a year later, in October 2021, after school districts statewide were mandated to return to in-person instruction, public school enrollment statewide hasn't rebounded.

These past two years buck a 20-year trend of slow but steady growth in the number of children in Washington public schools, growth that [hovered about 1% a year](#), with two years of declines in that time period.

So where did those students go?

"We get this question a lot," said Katy Payne, spokesperson for the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. She said the agency has been examining where students have gone throughout the pandemic and expects to have more definitive information later this year.

No one knows the full answer to that question yet, but there are a lot of hints.

[Next: Washington's class of 2021 graduates with a degree in resilience](#)

One major hint: State headcounts of home-school and private schools show that two years after schools went remote, some children have remained in the alternatives their parents chose early in the pandemic. To be clear, there are still many more students — nearly 1.07 million, not including pre-K — in public schools than there are in private schools or in home-based learning. But in 2019, there were 1.12 million enrolled in K-12.

The lower enrollment in public schools over the past two years means that about [\\$900 million in the state's original budget](#) for schools was not spent, mostly because the funds are distributed to districts according to student enrollment. This year, Gov. Jay Inslee's 2022 supplemental budget proposes reinvesting some of that unspent but budgeted money into nurses and school counselors.

OSPI officials hope lawmakers this session will release \$522 million of the budgeted money to local school districts, which would help local educators address pandemic learning loss and help with staff retention.

"We certainly don't think it's going to be a prolonged enrollment decline," said T.J. Kelly, OSPI chief financial officer. "But the question of how fast do we get back to those 2019-20 school year levels? You know, we can't definitively say whether we think it's next year or two years or three years, but we don't think it will be at this level forever."

The fall headcounts alone don't offer the complete picture. For instance, headcounts wouldn't necessarily show if an individual family shifted from private school to home-based schooling, if a family moved to a different state, if a student dropped out of the educational system altogether, or if parents didn't know they had to [fill out a state form](#) to register their children for home-schooling. And they don't necessarily show how families will choose to educate their children in the long term.

But so far, the headcounts suggest that during the past two school years, a significant number of families looked toward private and home-based options to get their children through the pandemic.

In October 2020, the number of home-schooled students in Washington state nearly doubled to about 39,000 students. This year, many of them remained in home-school.

Between the 2019-20 and 2021-22 school years, the number of home-schooling students increased by 11,212 — a jump of 54% from pre-pandemic levels, according to numbers from the OSPI.

“I’ve been surprised and delighted by how many stayed,” said Garrison Stuber of the Washington Homeschool Organization, a nonprofit that helps parents and home-school advocates with the ins and outs of home-based learning and keeps abreast of legislative issues.

Home-based learning also opened up as an option for parents who, perhaps for the first time, were mainly working from home, she said.

Garrison Stuber said many parents made the switch after learning about the resources available to help them meet the requirements and responsibilities of a home-based education, which includes, among other requirements, some parent qualifications, annual assessments and record-keeping, and teaching 11 core subjects.

“It’s not hard to get into, but it can be scary to get into,” Garrison Stuber said.

For many parents, shifting to home-based learning was a stopgap measure to provide educational consistency for their children throughout the year, she said.

As this year started, many parents had continued concerns about whether schools would be able to remain in-person or shift back and forth to remote learning. That has played out, with many schools [temporarily shifting back to remote learning](#) because of COVID-19 outbreaks among students or teachers.

Garrison Stuber expects more home-schooled students may return to public schools next year. Even for some parents who might have preferred home-based learning, it doesn’t fit everyone’s long-term situation, such as parents who have to return to a workplace or office, she said.

Private schools throughout the state also saw a significant enrollment jump from pre-pandemic numbers. The numbers that the state has collected show an increase of at least 20% over pre-pandemic numbers, though some private school advocates say their estimates are lower than that.

According to the [State Board of Education](#), which started collecting enrollment data from private schools in 2019, between the years 2019 and 2021, K-12 enrollment in private schools increased by at least 12,475 students. The number of pre-K students increased by 2,002. There are some caveats to the data: The schools that reported their enrollment to the state weren’t necessarily all the same schools both years, nor is there a requirement for private schools to report their enrollment numbers to the state.

The Washington Federation of Independent Schools, an advocacy group for private schools, estimated that the increase in private school enrollment statewide is closer to 10,000 students, said Suzie Hanson, the group’s executive director.

Hanson said an increase in enrollment across the board also doesn’t tell the whole picture of how the pandemic affected private schools.

Despite the increases in overall enrollment, many private school families had to leave their schools because they couldn’t afford tuition after a job loss or another financial barrier during the economic crunch in the first outbreak of the pandemic.

“Many private schools did try to help those parents,” but it wasn’t always feasible, Hanson said, adding that her organization is also curious about Washington’s enrollment shift during the pandemic.

“Everyone is wondering where all the public school students went,” Hanson said.

HEADLINE	02/01 Cuba vaccinating children as young as 2
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/01/cuba-leads-world-vaccinating-children
GIST	<p>The Swedes have rejected it, Dr Fauci says the US may soon approve it, the Chinese have started, but the Cubans have already vaccinated almost all young children against Covid.</p> <p>The island is the only country vaccinating toddlers as young as two against the disease, and more than 95% of two- to 18-year-olds have now been fully vaccinated, according to the ministry of public health.</p> <p>“Although Covid hits children less severely, they are an important factor in transmission,” said Dr Gerardo Guillén, the lead developer of Abdala, one of the island’s homegrown vaccines.</p> <p>Child vaccination, one of the world’s highest Covid vaccination rates and high herd immunity after a massive Delta peak last summer, he said, have contributed to significantly lower infection rates in Cuba than in the US and Europe throughout the Omicron wave.</p> <p>With confidence in the community-based health service high – and with a one-party state preventing anti-vax movements from taking root as they have elsewhere in Latin America – Cubans by and large trust their country’s vaccines. Inoculating young children is widely seen as common sense.</p> <p>“Children are vaccinated as soon as they are born,” said Ania Ramírez, 33, collecting her fully vaccinated son, Fabio, age five, from school. “If he’s already got all the other vaccines, why wouldn’t I put this in him?”</p> <p>Around the world, Covid vaccination ages are getting lower: the World Health Organization has recommended that if high levels of coverage have already been achieved in the adult population, countries should consider inoculating children as young as five with the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine. Chile and the United Arab Emirates are now vaccinating three-year-olds.</p> <p>But some countries are bucking the trend: the Swedish health agency last week decided against recommending Covid vaccines to children younger than 11, arguing there were no “clear benefits”.</p> <p>Experts say that there are benefits to vaccinating young children, but concerns remain.</p> <p>Dr Jon K Andrus, former regional immunization programme director at the Pan American Health Organisation and professor of public health at George Washington University, said that while Cuban scientists “make good quality vaccines”, he was wary of seeing children vaccinated before he had more information.</p> <p>“None of the results have been published in peer-reviewed journals, so it’s hard to discuss,” he said.</p> <p>Cuba’s vaccines, he said, are based on a platform “that has been used for decades on tetanus. It’s great technology, but you need the data because there might be an unexpected side-effect for this disease.”</p> <p>Cuban scientists say that phase I and II trials of Soberana 2 and Soberana Plus vaccines in 350 children aged between three and 18 found no serious adverse effects. Trial data, they say, has been sent to peer-review journals and is pending publication. Health officials say that in the coming weeks, all trial data will be sent to the World Health Organization, as they request export approvals.</p> <p>Dr Peter Hotez, dean of the National School of Tropical Medicine at Baylor College of Medicine in Texas, said that vaccination of young children “is essential” given the record number of kids in the US hospitalised with Omicron. But he emphasised the importance of strong public health communication.</p> <p>“The vaccine ecosystem is fragile,” he said. “If you get it wrong, especially with someone’s child, it can have spillover effects and derail other vaccine programmes.”</p>

	<p>He pointed to the Philippines, where a botched rollout of a new dengue vaccine in 2016 led to a widespread public perception that the vaccine was harmful. The consequence of that was a loss in public confidence in other child vaccines – resulting in a measles epidemic that killed hundreds.</p> <p>Dr Jerome Kim, director general of the International Vaccine Institute, a non-profit based in Seoul, said it “makes sense” to vaccinate young children, primarily to protect family members around them. “If the mum and dad are working, it’s often grandma and grandpa who take care of the child after school,” he said.</p> <p>He also emphasised the role that child vaccination can play in reducing poverty: data indicates that globally, for every dollar spent on vaccination, 44 dollars are saved in indirect costs.</p> <p>“It’s not only the direct cost of hospitalization that you save, but you save costs related to parents having to stay home,” he said.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/01 Black colleges second day of bomb threats
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/01/hbcus-bomb-threats-class-cancellations-second-day
GIST	<p>Several Black colleges and universities in the US received bomb threats and put their campuses on lockdown on Tuesday, a day after a rash of similar threats forced the cancellation of classes for the day at a number of schools.</p> <p>Howard University in Washington, University of the District of Columbia, Kentucky State, Xavier University of Louisiana and Fort Valley State in Georgia were among the historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) reporting threats, according to Twitter postings and local media.</p> <p>“Campus is currently on lockdown. Residential students remain in dorms. Non-residential students and staff should NOT report to campus until further notice. Campus operations are suspended for the day,” Fort Valley State said in a tweet.</p> <p>Howard gave the all clear on Tuesday morning after the campus received a threat at about 2.55am, it said on Twitter.</p> <p>Several HBCUs, Howard among them, told students and staff on Monday to shelter in place and canceled classes for the day after similar threats. Authorities said they did not find any suspicious devices, allowing the schools to reopen.</p> <p>A similar rash of threats to HBCUs occurred earlier in January.</p> <p>“The FBI is aware of the series of bomb threats around the country and we are working with our law enforcement partners to address any potential threats,” the FBI said in a statement on Tuesday.</p> <p>The agency encouraged members of the public to report anything suspicious to the bureau.</p> <p>Students at Xavier University in Louisiana were told to stay in their dorm rooms until further notice and to monitor university channels.</p> <p>“ALERT! XULA has received a bomb threat and is working with authorities. Campus will be remote until 12pm,” the school said in a tweet.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/01 Silent strike empties streets in Myanmar
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/feb/01/silent-strike-empties-streets-in-myanmar-on-anniversary-of-coup

GIST

Streets were deserted and shops abandoned across many of Myanmar's towns and cities on Monday, as the public defied threats by the military junta and stayed at home in a "silent strike" on the first anniversary of the country's coup.

Images posted on social media showed usually congested roads with no traffic and stores shuttered. In a photograph shared by Khit Thit Media, the usually busy Sule Pagoda road in downtown Yangon was completely empty. In Mandalay, the second largest city, a normally bustling market had virtually no customers.

Images posted online showed similar scenes across the country: from Myitkyina and Namati in Kachin, Myanmar's northernmost state, to Dawei and Myeik in Tanintharyi region in the south of the country.

The military, which has struggled to control widespread opposition to its rule, [had threatened](#) charges of sedition or terrorism against anyone who participated in the stay-at-home protest. Business owners had also been told their properties would be seized if they participated.

Some opened their stores but left them unattended to get around the threats. In one image shared widely on social media, a seller mockingly left a sign next to their food stall that said: "All menu items are available." Beside it, empty bowls were labelled "beans", "tofu" and "kale".

[The military ousted](#) the democratically elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi on 1 February 2021, and has inflicted deadly violence and terror in an attempt to crush opposition.

A 27-year-old resident in Yangon's Sanchaung township, who asked not to be named, said he had stayed at home, along with his family members and neighbours.

"I heard some voices around by lunchtime from the main road, with people singing a military anthem. They might be military supporters marching on the street to break the silent strike," he said.

He said he was afraid to go out even after the protest had ended. "I don't want to get into any trouble or get arrested," he said, adding that soldiers were patrolling.

Since the coup, more than 1,500 people have been killed, and at least 11,838 people have been arrested in military crackdowns, according to [the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners](#). Detainees have been subjected to torture and mistreatment, including beatings, gender-based violence and prolonged stress positions, according to [research by Human Rights Watch](#).

Despite the risk of further military violence, some activists held small rallies prior to the silent strike on Tuesday morning. Protesters, led by students, sprinkled the streets of Yangon with red paint, the colour associated with Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy. Activists shared images of the act on Facebook, writing: "Our blood is red and we will march towards our enemy."

In Mandalay, protesters marched in the morning, chanting: "Who dares to live on the opposite side of the people?"

Alongside peaceful protest movements, civilians, including many young people, have taken up arms and formed people's defence forces.

In Yangon several bombings thought to have been carried out by such groups were reported by local media on Monday. Another reportedly occurred at a police station in Myitkyina.

Armed resistance groups target the military with guerrilla attacks against military targets and key infrastructure. The military, in turn, has responded by launching airstrikes, burning villages, and blocking aid to civilians.

	<p>As of 27 December, about 320,900 people were internally displaced across Myanmar, as a result of the crisis and escalating conflict, according to the United Nations. A further 340,000 people were already displaced before the coup.</p> <p>A statement from the office of the UN secretary general, António Guterres, on Monday warned of “an intensification in violence, a deepening of the human rights and humanitarian crises and a rapid rise of poverty in Myanmar”.</p> <p>Before the anniversary of the coup, the US, Britain and Canada announced new, coordinated sanctions against Myanmar officials, including the attorney general, Thida Oo, the supreme court chief justice, Tun Tun Oo, and the anti-corruption commission chair, Tin Oo. The US said they were closely involved in the “politically motivated” prosecution of Aung San Suu Kyi. The ousted leader faces wide-ranging charges that have been widely criticised and faces spending the rest of her life in prison.</p> <p>The measures were welcomed by Anna Roberts, the executive director of Burma Campaign UK, who said countries should impose sanctions on companies and individuals that were financing the military. However, Roberts added that the new sanctions needed to be introduced more quickly. “It is vital to maximise pressure now while the military are more vulnerable,” she said.</p> <p>Rights groups have also called for further measures to block the junta’s access to foreign revenues from oil, gas, and other resources, and for the UN security council to pass a resolution instituting a global arms embargo on Myanmar, and which refers military atrocities to the international criminal court.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/01 China warns Winter Olympians on behavior
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2022/feb/01/winter-olympics-warned-careful-what-they-say-beijing-games-2022
GIST	<p>The chair of the Beijing Winter Olympics Athletes’ Commission has warned competitors that they “need to be responsible” if they decide to speak out about controversial issues.</p> <p>Athlete freedom has been one of the hot topics before these Games, with human rights groups warning there could be consequences for talking about events in Tibet, Hong Kong and Xinjiang. However, the former speed skater Yang Yang, who won two short-track golds at the 2002 Winter Games, insisted that athletes would be free to talk in mixed zones and interviews under the IOC’s rule 50, which covers “athlete expression” – although podium protests would be banned.</p> <p>But her words at a press conference on Tuesday were ambiguous enough that some in the audience felt she was warning athletes not to publicly criticise China’s human rights record.</p> <p>“We have Rule 50 from the IOC charter,” said Yang, who is also vice-president of the World Anti-Doping Agency. “It says very clearly about the freedom of speech for athletes, what kind of expressions they can make, at what time, during what events. Athletes are role models for the world and there is a lot of attention on them. They have their opinions and if they want to share that, that is important.</p> <p>“There are very strict rules in the charter. At the medal ceremonies, they cannot make their opinions but in press conferences or interviews, athletes are free to express their opinions. But athletes need to be responsible for what they say. We’ll work with the IOC and make sure that Rule 50 is strictly followed.”</p> <p>Yang’s comments follow others from Beijing 2022 deputy director general, Yang Shu, who said last month that athletes could be punished if their comments on human rights issues are “against the Olympic spirit, especially against Chinese laws and regulations”.</p> <p>Meanwhile the Olympic Games executive director, Christophe Dubi, has suggested that venues in Beijing could be between a third and a half full when the action starts in earnest after Friday’s opening ceremony.</p>

	<p>“There is going to be a scheme for spectators, which is going to be community-based, making sure we have a presence of spectators in the stands, and at the same time, having safety for all participants,” Dubi said. “In terms of capacity we are not there yet, because it has to be fine-tuned at a venue-by-venue basis, but I’d say if we have one person out of three [available spots] or out of two, that would already be a good result.”</p>
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HEADLINE	02/02 Ecuador: landslide in capital turns deadly
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/02/ecuador-landslide-deaths-hillside-collapses-quito
GIST	<p>A rain-weakened hillside collapsed in Ecuador’s capital, Quito, sweeping over homes and a sports field and killing at least 24 people, city officials have said.</p> <p>The Quito Security Department also said on Tuesday that 32 people were injured and eight houses had collapsed, with more damaged.</p> <p>Neighbours joined rescue workers in hunting through the ruins for survivors of the disaster that hit after nearly 24 hours of rainfall.</p> <p>The storm was pounding outside when Imelda Pacheco said she felt her house move as if an earthquake had struck. Suddenly water and rocks began to pour in through doors and windows and she fled before the building was destroyed.</p> <p>“I barely had time to grab the hand of my four-year-old son and I ran to the stairs, to the terrace. Suddenly the walls in front and to the side disappeared,” she told the Associated Press.</p> <p>“We shouted to the neighbours on the first floor, but the water carried away the mother and daughter,” she said, standing before the ruins of her home.</p> <p>“I thought I was going to die with my son. I hugged him strongly and we shook, I think from the cold and the fear ... We barely survived,” she added.</p> <p>Waves of mud, some three metres (10ft) high, carried away vehicles, motorcycles, rubbish bins and other debris in the neighbourhoods of La Gasca and La Comuna below the slopes of the Ruco Pinchincha mountain.</p> <p>As the rescue began, police called for silence so the cries of those trapped could be heard.</p> <p>Quito mayor Santiago Guarderas said the intense rains had saturated the soils, setting off the landslide.</p> <p>Smaller waves of muddy water continued pouring down on Tuesday morning past residents trying to shift stones, tree trunks and debris. An overturned taxi and other vehicles were partly buried in mud on a sports field.</p> <p>“I’ve lost everything. I don’t have anything. Everything is over,” said 65-year-old Laura Quiñónez, who stood beside an ambulance as her neighbours tried to recover appliances from their destroyed homes.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/02 US, Russia escalate war of words
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/02/02/ukraine-russia-putin-military-nato/
GIST	<p>KYIV, Ukraine — U.S. and Russian officials sharpened their verbal attacks on each other as Moscow’s ambassador in Washington accused the White House of “demonizing” Russia and lying about the Kremlin’s history of aggression.</p>

Russian Ambassador Anatoly Antonov slammed White House press secretary Jen Psaki's characterization of Russian President Vladimir Putin as a leader who has used chemical weapons and "invaded multiple countries in the past several years."

Instead, he claimed Moscow had a better record of compliance with international chemical weapons treaties, according to comments posted on the embassy's Facebook page late Tuesday. He also criticized Washington's "bloody experiments" to bring democracy to the former Yugoslavia, Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan.

Those interventions brought the world "nothing but chaos, instability and loss of lives," Antonov said. "We encourage our colleagues to look in the mirror more often before blaming or lecturing others."

The sharp rhetoric followed the White House's dismissal of Putin's claim that Moscow would be forced into conflict with NATO if Ukraine joins the Western military alliance and attempts to seize back Crimea, which the Kremlin annexed in 2014.

That assertion was Putin's latest effort to paint Ukraine and its partners in the West as the aggressors in the current crisis, even as Moscow masses more than 100,000 troops around the borders of its smaller neighbor. The Russian leader also accused the United States and NATO of using Ukraine to hem in Russia and ignoring Moscow's security concerns.

"When the fox is screaming from the top of the henhouse that he's scared of the chickens, which is essentially what they're doing, that fear isn't reported as a statement of fact," Psaki said Tuesday, as Western officials continued diplomatic efforts to defuse a potential further Russian invasion of Ukraine. "We know who the fox is in this case."

Moscow has long taken issue with NATO granting membership to countries in the former Soviet sphere, and it has demanded that the organization roll back its forces in Eastern Europe and promise that Ukraine will never join the alliance. NATO has refused to change its open door policy allowing countries to seek entry into the bloc, whose members are bound to defend each other against attack.

"Let's imagine that Ukraine is a member of NATO, is stuffed with weapons — there are modern offensive systems, like in Poland and Romania — and begins an operation in the Crimea," Putin said Tuesday. "Do we have to fight with the NATO bloc? Has anyone thought anything about it? It seems not."

Prime Minister Kaja Kallas of Estonia, which joined NATO in 2004, blamed Russia for starting the crisis. "First of all, it is that Russia is creating this military buildup around Ukraine and then presenting ultimatums," she said Tuesday on Washington Post Live.

The same day that Putin accused the West of making Ukraine a pawn in a great-power showdown, Russia's top diplomat at the United Nations indicated Moscow would use its rotating presidency of the Security Council this month to shine a spotlight on contentious issues, such as the use of sanctions as a foreign policy tool.

Biden is threatening Putin with personal sanctions over Ukraine. What to know about this pressure tactic.

"We've been sanctioned so many times that we've lost count," Russian Ambassador Vasily Nebenzya said at a news conference Tuesday. "The most ironic thing about it is they're now talking about sanctions before anything happens — preventive sanctions."

"We've been through this a long time already," he added. "We've learned to live with it."

The United States and Britain are publicly considering imposing some of the toughest sanctions on Russia and on allies of Putin in an effort to deter the Kremlin from a renewed invasion of Ukraine.

	<p>Nebenzya also suggested that he would use the United Nations to highlight the Minsk agreements as a political solution to the Ukraine crisis.</p> <p>Putin wants to push NATO away from Russia. Instead, he's getting more NATO troops on his border.</p> <p>The accords, which are viewed as generally favorable to Moscow, were brokered by Berlin and Paris after the Russian annexation of Crimea. The Kremlin has charged the West with failing to push Ukraine to implement the 2015 accord that called for a measure of autonomy in Ukraine's rebel-held east and an amnesty for Russian-backed insurgents there.</p> <p>The peace deal was widely condemned by Ukrainians, and officials in Kyiv have warned that implementing it now would destabilize the country. The deal also called on Russia to end its interference in the region and withdraw troops from the Ukrainian border.</p> <p>The Ukraine-Russia standoff continues to alarm regional neighbors and has prompted top NATO leaders to visit Kyiv in recent days. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who met Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on Tuesday, appealed to Russian citizens to think about the human cost of war.</p> <p>Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki, also in Kyiv, pledged to help Ukraine with energy, arms and financial aid. "Living close to a neighbor like Russia, we have the feeling of living at the foot of a volcano," he said.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/01 Guinea-Bissau president: attempted coup
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/02/01/guinea-bissau-coup-attempt/
GIST	<p>The president of Guinea-Bissau posted a message to Twitter saying he was "fine" Tuesday after mutinous soldiers tried to overthrow the tiny nation's government in an hours-long shootout.</p> <p>Video captured gunmen storming the main government compound, and West African leaders condemned an "attempted coup" in the country of 2 million, which has a long history of military uprisings.</p> <p>"The situation is under control," wrote President Umaro Sissoco Embaló, who took office in 2020 and who local media outlets reported was in the compound when the attackers arrived.</p> <p>The 15-nation Economic Community of West African States, or ECOWAS, earlier asked the soldiers in a statement to "return to their barracks" and keep the president safe, echoing the plea it made to military officers in Burkina Faso only eight days earlier.</p> <p>State radio on Wednesday said six people were killed in the attempt, including two members of the presidential guard and four of the attackers, according to Reuters.</p> <p>West Africa has endured four coups in 18 months. Soldiers across the region are toppling elected leaders at the highest rate in four decades, analysts say. The overthrows tend to start with protest movements and a sense the government has failed people — on education, jobs, health care and security.</p> <p>In Burkina Faso, where soldiers deposed the president Jan. 24, thousands have died in a conflict that has only grown since 2015. They blamed authorities for failing to equip the army in the battle against fighters linked to the Islamic State and al-Qaeda.</p> <p>In neighboring Mali — where researchers say those insurgencies took hold — military leaders have twice sacked the president since August 2020, initially accusing the government of diverting funds from the army and leaving soldiers vulnerable to slaughter.</p> <p>Warfare in vast stretches of West Africa has made it impossible for many to go to the doctor or school. More than 2.6 million people have lost their homes, according to the U.N.'s refugee agency.</p>

Guinea-Bissau, a coastal nation with 88 islands, has avoided the insurgency threat faced elsewhere in the region.

Speaking to reporters Tuesday, Embaló said that an “isolated” segment of the military led the rebellion and that “many” people died.

The country emerged in economic tatters from an 11-year war for freedom from Portuguese colonial rule. Leaders turned to [illicit sources of income](#), which fueled instability. In the past two decades alone, Guinea-Bissau has counted two successful coups, a civil war and a presidential assassination. Just one president has finished a term since the country gained independence in 1974.

The United Nations has blasted security forces for trafficking cocaine, and Guinea-Bissau developed a reputation as Africa’s [first narco-state](#). The United States posted a reward of up to \$5 million in September for the former head of the military, Antonio Indjai, calling him one of the country’s “most powerful destabilizing figures.”

Officials accused the former general of clearing smuggling paths for South American drug gangs. But Indjai continued to split his time between his home in the capital, Bissau, and his cashew farm in the countryside. Analysts said the [president feared that handing over the influential figure](#) could spark another mutiny.

As news of the chaos reached social media Tuesday, West Africans lamented the pattern.

“Nobody wants a coup,” [tweeted](#) Lare Sisay, a retired U.N. development manager in Gambia, “but West Africa needs to address the issue of bad governance, corruption and abuse of power or risk being engulfed in endless unconstitutional changes of government.”

Gyude Moore, a senior policy fellow at the Center for Global Development and Liberia’s former minister of public works, compared it to a contagion.

“The ‘coup’ virus,” he [wrote](#), “is now airborne across the sub-region.”

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HEADLINE	02/01 Report on London police: misogyny, racism
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/01/world/europe/london-police-misogyny-racism.html
GIST	<p>LONDON — London police officers routinely made jokes about rape and exchanged racist messages, according to a report from England’s official police watchdog that detailed a pattern of misogyny and bullying in the force, the latest blow to an embattled service that has faced intense scrutiny in recent months.</p> <p>The findings reflected a troubling culture within the London Metropolitan Police Service, according to the report released Tuesday by the Independent Office for Police Conduct, the police watchdog, which made more than a dozen recommendations to tackle the problem. It said the episodes it detailed were not isolated ones or the work of a few “bad apples.”</p> <p>The report comes amid growing calls for increased scrutiny of the force after the kidnapping, rape and murder of Sarah Everard, a 33-year-old London woman, by a Metropolitan Police Service officer in March 2021 highlighted broader concerns about misogyny within policing, and violence against women and girls.</p> <p>“The behavior we uncovered was disgraceful and fell well below the standards expected of the officers involved,” Sal Naseem, the police watchdog’s regional director, said in a statement, adding that the “issues are not isolated or historic.”</p>

Mr. Naseem said that the watchdog welcomed current efforts to root out problematic behavior and attitudes from the police force, [including a continuing formal independent review of the standards and culture within the service](#), but “more is required.”

“Our recommendations focus on the identified cultural issues and aim to ensure that those who work for the force feel safe with their colleagues, and that communities feel safe with those whose job is to protect them,” Mr. Naseem said.

The Metropolitan Police Service said [in a statement](#) that the actions of the police officers in central London that the report detailed do “not represent the values” of the force.

The report was the result of findings from a series of investigations into the Metropolitan Police Service that uncovered evidence of bullying and discrimination within its ranks. They began after a complaint alleging that an officer had sex with a drunk person at a police station, but soon grew to encompass many more issues.

The investigation ended in September after a review of thousands of messages between officers, according to the report, which included many that were “highly sexualized, discriminatory or referred to violence” and which were generally described as “banter” by officers in their defense.

The report also detailed repeated racism and xenophobia, with messages between officers that mocked the Black Lives Matter movement and non-Christian religions, insulted people with disabilities and included homophobic comments.

The investigations were initiated in 2018, long before the national outcry over policing that followed Ms. Everard’s death, but have since taken on new resonance.

The evidence uncovered in the report included a series of messages between officers in WhatsApp groups, with highly offensive and openly racist commentary, as well as disparaging comments about women.

In one exchange, two officers talked about domestic violence, with one officer writing about women, “Knock a bird about and she will love you. Human nature.”

In another exchange, a male officer told a female officer, “I would happily rape you.”

The report said that “the casual exchange and blasé nature of this communication indicates a culture where officers were comfortable to make these comments, suggesting it was part of a status quo rather than an exception to the norm.” It added: “the messages appeared to be sent without fear of repercussion or consequence.”

The report offered 15 recommendations aimed at tackling the underlying cultural issues in the force, which included recommending that it “publicly commit to being an anti-racist organization with a zero-tolerance policy toward sexism, misogyny, bullying and harassment.”

Bas Javid, the deputy assistant commissioner of the Metropolitan Police Service, [said in a statement](#) that he was “angry and disappointed to see officers involved in sharing sexist, racist and discriminatory messages,” and it was clear more work needed to be done to eradicate bullying and discrimination from the force.

“The actions of these officers between 2016 and 2018 were unacceptable, unprofessional, disrespectful and deeply offensive,” he said.

Several officers have already been subject to misconduct proceedings as a result of the investigation. Fourteen were put under notice that they were being investigated, and two officers were dismissed for gross misconduct and put on a list that bars them from future employment with the police, according to the watchdog. Two others resigned and several others faced disciplinary action.

Sue Fish, the former chief of Nottinghamshire Police in northern England, who has been a vocal advocate for ending misogyny within the police service, said the report “graphically portrays the toxic racist and sexist culture which is endemic in policing.”

She said police forces should make it clear that there is zero tolerance for such behavior, make it clear to officers that their interactions on social media are subject to the officers’ code of conduct, including when off duty, and transform vetting and recruitment.

“This report focuses on the Met, but it could be reflected in virtually any police station up and down the country,” she said.

Some lawmakers have called for the resignation of Cressida Dick, the head of the Metropolitan Police Service, including Diane Abbott, an opposition Labour lawmaker who represents an east London district, [in a post on Twitter](#).

But the government has so far stood behind Ms. Dick despite the turmoil of the last year.

Priti Patel, Britain’s home secretary, who is responsible for overseeing policing nationally, in a statement condemned the officers’ behavior as “sickening” and called on the police service and London’s mayor to implement the recommendations “as soon as practically possible.”

Yvette Cooper, the opposition Labour party’s lawmaker responsible for policing, said the actions were a “total disgrace.”

“The vital work police do means highest standards must always be maintained and abuse must be rooted out,” [she said in a statement](#).

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HEADLINE	02/01 Hungary PM: Russia demands ‘reasonable’
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/01/world/europe/orban-putin-moscow-ukraine.html
GIST	<p>MOSCOW — Splitting sharply from his NATO allies, Prime Minister Viktor Orban of Hungary said on Tuesday that proposed sanctions against Russia if it takes military action against Ukraine would be “doomed to failure” and that Russian security demands were reasonable.</p> <p>Visiting Moscow, Mr. Orban met privately for five hours with President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia, and afterward said at an amiable news conference with Mr. Putin that he “did not see any intention” for Russia to escalate the conflict with Ukraine.</p> <p>Most Western leaders have denounced Mr. Putin for deploying more than 100,000 troops near Ukraine’s borders, and U.S. and NATO officials have warned that Russia appeared to be preparing for an invasion. Hungary is a member of the European Union and NATO, which have both pledged to respond forcefully to a Russian invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>“The president was very calm and said that Russia’s demands for security guarantees are normal and should be the basis for negotiations,” said Mr. Orban. “And I agree with that. We must negotiate.”</p> <p>As Washington floats a strict sanctions regime in the event of a new Russian incursion into Ukraine, Mr. Orban said previous sanctions “did not bring the desired effect in the case of Russia at all.”</p> <p>He said the sanctions imposed by the European Union after Russia annexed Crimea in 2014 did more harm to Hungary than their intended target.</p>

Mr. Orban, perhaps Mr. Putin's closest ally inside the European Union, has long been accused of undermining the 27-member bloc's common foreign policy and democratic standards. It was the 12th meeting between the two leaders since 2013.

"Mr. Orban is practically behaving like a tool of Russian foreign policy," said Peter Kreko, a senior fellow at the Center for European Policy Analysis and director of Political Capital, a research group in Budapest.

Relations between Kyiv and Budapest soured in 2017 over a law Ukraine passed making Ukrainian the official language of education, which Hungary said discriminated against the ethnic Hungarian minority in the country's west. Since then, Budapest has blocked operations of the NATO-Ukraine Council, the primary forum for the military alliance to engage with Kyiv.

In 2019 Mr. Orban [welcomed](#) to Budapest an obscure Russian development bank whose chairman had longstanding ties to Russian intelligence agencies, giving its leadership diplomatic immunity. Hungary became the first E.U. country to use the Russian coronavirus vaccine, Sputnik V, contravening the advice of the E.U.'s medicines regulator.

The Ukraine crisis has amplified calls for Europe to rely less on Russian natural gas, but Mr. Orban has done the opposite: He signed a 15-year deal with Gazprom, the Russian state energy company, in September, and he is seeking to buy more.

Unlike most its neighbors, Hungary has also signaled that it would neither allow increased NATO troop presence on its soil, nor send more aid to Ukraine.

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HEADLINE	02/02 At-home rapid tests too late for omicron?
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/02/us/politics/biden-covid-tests.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — As the United States saw a nearly vertical increase in coronavirus cases in late December and a growing backlash over a shortage of rapid tests, President Biden promised that his administration would mail 500 million of them to Americans, free of charge.</p> <p>There was a major hitch: The administration had yet to secure a single test kit for the program. The announcement sent officials hunting for stockpiles in warehouses around the country and uncommitted supply from large manufacturers.</p> <p>Today the federal government is mailing tens of millions of rapid tests requested through a new Postal Service website that has sustained heavy traffic, with roughly 60 million households ordering the tests so far, according to the White House. The nation has a little more than twice that many households overall, suggesting enormous interest. Orders are limited to four per household for now.</p> <p>Testing shortages have bedeviled the government since the beginning of the pandemic, and the resurgent supply of at-home tests, which deliver results in about 15 minutes, may be coming too late, given that the Omicron variant has already peaked in many regions. But the home deliveries, and broadened access to tests overall, represent a striking turnaround for an administration that had struggled to meet demand as it focused largely on vaccination.</p> <p>It succeeded partly by turning to a cast of new players in a fast-expanding market, including one company that had never before made rapid tests. The administration also spent billions late last summer and in the fall purchasing tests directly from manufacturers, and sped up the process for reviewing and authorizing new tests.</p> <p>Mr. Biden's announcement days before Christmas came as tests had all but disappeared from retail shelves. The world's largest testing manufacturers, which were already racing to meet skyrocketing demand from public and commercial buyers around the world, could not possibly provide that many tests for Americans on such short notice.</p>

So the administration turned at first to several little-known companies that had supplies of federally authorized tests in warehouses, ready to ship. One of them, Medea Inc., in Pleasanton, Calif., had previously [imported vodka bottles equipped with LED lights](#) promoted by Shaquille O'Neal, drawing ridicule from a top Republican senator at [a recent hearing](#).

By mid-January, the administration announced a series of much larger contracts with test manufacturers — and a plan to double the number of free tests that Mr. Biden planned to send Americans, bringing the total to a billion.

The contractors for the program have committed to providing more than 550 million tests, a White House spokesman said. They include Illinois-based Abbott Laboratories, which makes a popular at-home test called BinaxNOW and is receiving about \$300 million; Roche, the Swiss pharmaceutical giant that is distributing tests made by a Korean manufacturer and is being paid roughly the same amount; and the German company Siemens Healthineers. Roche and Siemens received federal clearance for their tests in December.

The administration made its biggest bet — with a \$1.3 billion contract — on iHealth, a company based in Sunnyvale, Calif., that until late last year had never made a rapid test. Now it is a major supplier not just to the federal government, but also to states and cities. (The administration [announced another order](#) with the company on Friday, purchasing nearly 105 million more test kits.)

The company, which previously focused on making medical devices like forehead thermometers, got authorization from the Food and Drug Administration for its test in November. Its Chinese manufacturer has since hired 16,000 additional workers and is sending more than 10 million tests a day to the United States on cargo jets, according to Jack Feng, iHealth's chief operating officer.

Abbott said it manufactured 70 million tests in January and would ramp up to 100 million a month by March. Mr. Feng said iHealth was currently making 300 million tests per month.

Officials said the federal government contracted for as many tests as the companies could make, as long as they did not interrupt other orders. Mr. Feng said the Biden administration set its sights on iHealth because more established manufacturers had already committed their near-term supply to other customers around the globe.

“We are only focused on the U.S. market,” he said.

When Mr. Biden took office last winter as the virus raged, he vowed to make testing cheap and easily accessible. He formed what he called a “pandemic testing board” to improve supply and access, but its work remained all but invisible. While the first over-the-counter rapid antigen test was authorized in December 2020, they did not become readily available in pharmacies until last spring.

Some experts have said that the F.D.A. [was slow to review](#) and authorize new tests last year because of meticulous standards that made swift market growth challenging, even in a public health emergency. In the fall, the agency worked with the National Institutes of Health to introduce [an accelerated review process](#) that has allowed regulators to clear tests within days of receiving final data.

There are now [14 authorizations of over-the-counter rapid antigen tests](#), compared with around a half-dozen at the end of the summer.

The Biden administration [could have also moved more aggressively by making](#) larger, European-style investments in at-home tests earlier in 2021, some experts said, guaranteeing a larger, more stable market for manufacturers and allowing the administration to stockpile for future variant-driven surges.

The administration did make a targeted effort last year to supply tests, said Tom Inglesby, the White House testing coordinator. He cited billions of dollars worth of rapid and lab tests delivered to schools and long-term care facilities.

“It’s kind of portrayed that somehow that the government stopped being interested in testing,” Mr. Inglesby said. “Absolutely not true.”

By the spring and early summer, virus cases had fallen significantly, and demand for at-home testing cratered. Abbott [discarded heaps of test supplies](#) in Maine and temporarily shuttered its Illinois factory. At the time, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said that fully vaccinated people exposed to the virus did not need to test unless they displayed symptoms, guidance that was [later reversed](#).

The administration did not make its most substantial commitments to at-home testing until late summer and fall, when fewer tests were authorized. In September and October, the administration [pledged \\$3 billion](#) to guarantee purchases of at-home tests, helping companies such as Abbott and Quidel keep supply lines open, officials said.

The investment is now paying off, White House officials said, as tests return to pharmacy shelves and are sent to community clinics and schools.

Mr. Inglesby said the administration’s \$3 billion investment had propped up test makers when demand was substantially lower in the late summer and fall. The number of over-the-counter tests available to the U.S. market grew from 25 million in August to 375 million last month, with another increase projected for February, he said. That inventory is separate from the tests in the administration’s mail program.

The Biden administration last year also regularly invoked the Defense Production Act, which can be used to compel companies to prioritize the manufacturing of key supplies; it also took other actions that had a similar effect, including by helping pipette manufacturers get better access to resin needed for test kits, said Tim Manning, a White House supply official.

The new accelerated review process has attracted interest from a wide range of testing manufacturers, who must prove they can make [a substantial number of tests](#). One test, [made by Maxim Biomedical](#), was authorized in mid-January after an expedited review.

It is still unclear whether a better supply of rapid tests could have contained a variant as infectious as Omicron, which also overwhelmed countries where such tests were in wide use even before its arrival. But the tests have another important public health purpose: New treatments for the virus must be given early in the course of infection, so identifying cases quickly is crucial.

The tests are also providing an extra layer of security to Americans who are now more in the habit of using them. In an [Axios-Ipsos poll](#) conducted in late January, 44 percent of respondents said they had already ordered free tests through the government. Eighty-four percent of respondents said they supported the plan, including a majority of unvaccinated respondents.

Mailing out the tests has required an elaborate effort in itself. The Health and Human Services Department recently hired Steven Goddard, a senior FedEx official, to help with the logistics. The Postal Service, which is managing the deliveries, [hired thousands of temporary employees](#) and arranged dozens of fulfillment centers.

The [website](#) where people can order the free tests — which has so far been largely free of glitches — suggests using them at least five days after close contact with someone infected with the virus; if symptoms appear; or before gatherings, especially with vulnerable people.

The Biden administration has said it is not cannibalizing supplies of tests from states, since its contracts for the mail program specified that companies could not divert supplies intended for other customers. But Gene Burk, the director of procurement for Connecticut, said that iHealth told him the federal

	<p>government's contract initially slowed shipments of that company's tests to his state, although the problem was fixed.</p> <p>Mr. Burk added that although Connecticut was in talks with Roche to supply future tests, "their ability to supply product to states is directly affected by their ability to meet their commitments to the federal contract."</p> <p>Mr. Feng of iHealth acknowledged that he gave the federal government priority at first, and that states had complained about slower deliveries.</p> <p>Noting that the mailed tests are most likely arriving too late to have much effect on the Omicron surge, Dr. Mark B. McClellan, a Duke University health policy professor, said that another new Biden policy, requiring insurers to reimburse people for at-home tests, "seems like a more promising longer-term direction."</p> <p>Still, Mara Aspinall, an expert in biomedical diagnostics at Arizona State University who is also on the board of OraSure, which makes rapid coronavirus tests, said that the Biden administration should use the lesson it learned over the past six weeks.</p> <p>"The world has changed," she said. "The culture among Americans has changed. People are now willing and interested to do Covid tests at home."</p>
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HEADLINE	02/01 FBI: China 'massive' technology theft effort
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/feb/1/fbi-chief-wray-china-still-engaged-large-scale-hac/
GIST	<p>China's intelligence services and related hackers are engaged in a "massive, sophisticated" program to steal information as part of a technology theft campaign larger than all other foreign adversaries combined, according to FBI Director Christopher A. Wray.</p> <p>Additionally, Chinese intelligence agents, including professional officers, government officials and co-opted Americans, are all part of a plan to obtain valuable American proprietary technical know-how to support the ruling Communist Party regime, Mr. Wray said in a speech in California on Monday night.</p> <p>The China threat today "reached a new level — more brazen, more damaging than ever before — and it's vital that all of us focus on that threat together," the FBI chief said. He noted that more than 2,000 FBI investigations are focused on Chinese efforts to steal U.S. information and technology.</p> <p>"There's just no other country that presents a broader threat to our ideas, innovation and economic security than China," he said. "The Chinese government steals staggering volumes of information and causes deep, job-destroying damage across a wide range of industries, so much so that we're constantly opening new cases to counter their intelligence operations about every 12 hours."</p> <p>In some of his most extensive comments on the Chinese campaign, Mr. Wray, noting the FBI's role in battling the Soviet Union during the Cold War, said the primary adversary for the U.S. now is with China.</p> <p>"Today, we in the United States and the Western world find ourselves in a very different struggle against another global adversary: the Chinese Communist Party," he said. "There are some surface-level similarities between the threat posed by the Chinese government and the historical threat of the Soviet Union. The Chinese government also rejects the fundamental freedoms, basic human rights and democratic norms we value as Americans."</p> <p>Unlike with the Soviet Union, U.S. firms are heavily invested in China's economy, and Beijing dispatches large numbers of students to elite U.S. universities. China also commands a far greater financial power and a more dynamic economy than the Soviet Union had before its collapse in 1991, Mr. Wray said.</p>

He said Beijing is using its global reach and market power “to steal and threaten rather than to cooperate and build.”

“That theft, those threats, are happening right here in America literally every day,” he said.

The threat is not just economic; it also poses a challenge to American freedom, the FBI chief said.

China’s state-controlled media provided no immediate response to Mr. Wray’s remarks.

Neal Ziring, technical director of the National Security Agency’s cybersecurity directorate, seconded the FBI chief’s warnings. He said Tuesday that Chinese threats in cyberspace are “huge.”

“The Chinese government has a large number of folks that are dedicated to doing this, spread across multiple elements of their government,” Mr. Ziring said during an online meeting of the Intelligence and National Security Alliance. “And they are very aggressive at what they do.”

The Chinese operations are targets of U.S. intelligence agencies, including the National Security Agency, as well as private-sector security companies, he said. But more needs to be known about Chinese cyber-espionage tradecraft to better counter the threat, he said.

Asked about knowledge of Chinese hacking activities, Mr. Ziring said, “We have some good insights, but we always like to have more.”

The Chinese government uses multiple avenues of attack, often in seemingly nonthreatening ways, analysts say.

For example, President Xi Jinping’s “Made in China 2025” plan targets 10 areas where China seeks to be a technological and market world leader in robotics, green energy production and vehicles, aerospace, pharmaceuticals and other industries.

Chinese spies “throw every tool in their arsenal at stealing the technology to succeed in those areas,” Mr. Wray said. “Here in the U.S., they unleash a massive, sophisticated hacking program that’s bigger than those of every other major country combined.”

The technology collectors operate from most major cities in China and often join forces with cybercriminals whom the FBI chief described as “cyber mercenaries.” He cited the example of a group of Chinese cybercriminals associated with the Ministry of State Security, the civilian spy agency, which he said stole “terabytes” of data from hundreds of companies.

“They’re not just hacking on a huge scale but causing indiscriminate damage to get to what they want, like in the recent Microsoft Exchange hack, which compromised the networks of more than 10,000 American companies in a single campaign alone,” he said.

Chinese intelligence officers support those efforts by targeting the same information, exploiting “scores of co-optees” — people who are not technically Chinese officials but take part in intelligence operations and identify sources, providing cover and communications for spy operations. The human spying networks seek to obtain secrets in nontechnical ways.

China’s government also invests in partnerships with U.S. companies that will give proxies supporting Beijing inside access to valuable technology.

“Sometimes they just wave enough money to get what they want, but often they also conceal which companies they actually control or use companies they don’t literally own but instead can control through embedded Chinese Communist Party cells,” Mr. Wray said.

Disguising the deception

One goal of the Chinese covert operations is to disguise their technology acquisition efforts from American companies and the U.S. government. The case in Ohio of Chinese intelligence officer Xu Yanjun, recently convicted of economic espionage, highlights what Mr. Wray said is an example of efforts to steal aviation-related technology.

The FBI said Mr. Xu was engaged in getting proprietary information on an advanced aircraft engine produced by General Electric and a foreign joint venture. Mr. Xu recruited company insiders with access to sensitive data who assisted MSS hackers operating from inside China to target the same data. He also exploited his relationship with a senior information technology official to plant malware in a joint venture laptop.

As a result, the Chinese government was able to steal technology related to a composite turbofan blade technology unique to GE and is now working to produce a copy of the engine.

The operation also involved the use of the social media business platform LinkedIn, a favorite of Chinese intelligence, Mr. Wray said.

“Xu is just one Chinese intelligence officer working for an entire unit dedicated solely to stealing aviation secrets, which is just one of those 10 technology areas the Chinese government has prioritized for stealing,” he said.

Chinese government hackers also have obtained massive amounts of personal data on millions of Americans from hospitals, health insurance companies and credit card firms.

Mr. Wray said Mr. Xi’s promises in 2015 to halt the hacking of U.S. technology and supplying it to Chinese companies did not reduce the problem. “In the years since, they’ve hit ever more companies and workers,” he said.

Stolen data includes source codes from U.S. software companies, testing data and chemical designs from drug companies, and engineering designs from manufacturers.

“The common thread is that they steal the things companies can’t afford to lose, so the Chinese government’s economic theft campaign is not just unprecedented in its breadth, it’s also deeply damaging, undoing the labor, ideas and investments of decades, and leaving lives overturned in its wake,” Mr. Wray said.

China’s government also is targeting people inside the United States “for personal and political retribution,” Mr. Wray said. They include perceived enemies, refugees, dissidents and minority Uyghurs in western China who the State Department declared last year were victims of a government policy of genocide.

Beijing launched its “Fox Hunt” program in 2014 under cover of an anti-corruption drive but in reality “targets, captures and repatriates former Chinese citizens living overseas whom it sees as a political or financial threat,” he said.

More than 9,000 people have been forcibly repatriated as part of the Fox Hunt program, under which they are imprisoned or controlled by the government. The program was successful, Mr. Wray said, because much like Beijing’s economic espionage program, the Chinese involved disregard diplomatic norms and international law in grabbing victims.

Hundreds of people in America, primarily green card holders or naturalized citizens, are on the Fox Hunt target list.

The program is “the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the Chinese government’s transnational repression,” Mr. Wray said.

	<p>“For decades, the Chinese Communist Party has targeted, threatened and harassed U.S.-based Tibetans and Uyghurs, Falun Gong adherents, pro-democracy advocates and any others who question their legitimacy or authority,” he said.</p> <p>Mr. Wray said the FBI is applying lessons learned from fighting terrorism to countering the Chinese government threat, using joint counterintelligence task forces around the country.</p> <p>“The volume of criminal and threatening actions we see from the Chinese government is immense, but the good news is that our partners and allies these days are more alert to the danger than ever,” he said.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/01 Federal debt tops \$30 trillion
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/feb/1/federal-debt-tops-30-trillion-added-1-trillion-les/
GIST	<p>Uncle Sam’s total debt now tops \$30 trillion, the Treasury Department said Tuesday.</p> <p>Of that, \$23.5 trillion is held by outside creditors, and \$6.5 trillion is IOUs within the federal government, such as borrowing from trust funds.</p> <p>It took just a month and a half to add the latest \$1 trillion, after Congress approved a debt limit surge late last year to accommodate the government’s pandemic-fueled spending spree.</p> <p>“The milestone of \$30 trillion in debt should be a giant red flag for all of us about America’s future economic health, generational equity, and role in the world,” said Michael A. Peterson, CEO of the Peter G. Peterson Foundation, a prominent budget watchdog.</p> <p>He said the path to \$30 trillion was paved by “fiscal irresponsibility on both sides of the aisle,” but said the country as a whole will suffer with rising interest costs crowding out other spending programs, even as demands on the federal budget grow with an aging population.</p> <p>The debt stood at just \$5.7 trillion when President George W. Bush took office in 2001, and rose to \$10.6 trillion by the time President Obama was sworn in. It stood at \$19.9 trillion for President Trump in 2017, and stood at \$27.8 trillion when President Biden took office last year.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/01 Job openings rose amid worker shortage
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/feb/1/job-openings-rose-december-amid-worker-shortages/
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. employers stepped up their search for workers in December despite the looming impact of the omicron wave of coronavirus infections.</p> <p>The number of posted jobs rose 1.4% to 10.9 million on the last day of December, compared with the previous month, the Labor Department said Tuesday. That is far higher than pre-pandemic levels, though just below the record number of 11.1 million that was reached in July.</p> <p>The data suggests companies were still desperate to hire workers last month yet had trouble finding enough people to fill their open jobs. A measure of hiring actually fell in December, according to Tuesday’s report. There were approximately 1.6 available jobs for every person actively seeking work that month.</p> <p>Even so, most economists expect that job gains likely took a hit in January, as the omicron wave sickened millions of people, forcing them to stay home and isolate or care for people who were sick. Fewer people likely sought work out of fear of the virus, executives at some staffing agencies said.</p> <p>Economists are projecting that businesses and other employers added just 165,000 jobs in January, according to data provider FactSet. That would be the fewest since December 2020. Some economists,</p>

	<p>however, expect that the economy shed jobs in January because so many Americans were likely forced to stay home due to illness, and some were probably counted as unemployed. Still, hiring is likely to bounce back in February as omicron fades and Americans resume traveling and eating out, and more people are able to take jobs.</p> <p>About 4.3 million people quit their jobs in December, the government's Tuesday report said, down from a record of 4.5 million in November. Still, far more Americans are leaving their jobs than before the pandemic, a positive sign because most people who quit do so for a better-paying job.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/01 WHO: glut of waste from Covid response
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/feb/1/too-many-masks-who-cites-glut-of-waste-from-covid/
GIST	<p>GENEVA — The World Health Organization says overuse of gloves, “moon suits” and the use of billions of masks and vaccination syringes to help prevent the spread of the coronavirus have spurred a huge glut of health care waste worldwide.</p> <p>The U.N. health agency reported Tuesday that tens of thousands of tons of extra medical waste has strained waste management systems and is threatening both health and the environment, pointing to a “dire need” to improve those systems and get a response from both governments and people.</p> <p>“Part of the message for the public is to become more of a conscious consumer,” said Dr. Margaret Montgomery, technical officer of WHO’s water, sanitation, hygiene and health unit. “In terms of the volume, it’s enormous.”</p> <p>“We find that people are wearing excessive PPE,” Montgomery said, referring to personal protection equipment.</p> <p>The agency says most of the roughly 87,000 tons of such equipment – including what she called “moon suits” and gloves — obtained from March 2020 to November 2021 to battle COVID-19 has ended up as waste. More than 8 billion doses of vaccine administered globally have produced 143 tons of extra waste in terms of syringes, needles and safety boxes.</p> <p>“It is absolutely vital to provide health workers with the right (protective gear),” Dr. Michael Ryan, WHO’s emergencies chief, said in a statement. “But it is also vital to ensure that it can be used safely without impacting on the surrounding environment.”</p> <p>In the statement, Dr. Anne Woolridge of the International Solid Waste Association said “safe and rational use” of personal protective equipment would reduce environmental harm, save money, reduce possible supply shortages and help prevent infection “by changing behaviors.”</p> <p>WHO issued recommendations like use of “eco-friendly” packaging and shipping as well as reusable equipment and recyclable or biodegradable materials.</p> <p>Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the WHO director-general, said the excess waste potentially exposes health workers to “needle-stick injuries, burns, infection, and affects communities living near poorly managed landfills and waste disposal sites.”</p> <p>The agency called for investment in “non-burn waste treatment” technologies. It reported that 30 percent of healthcare facilities worldwide – and 60 percent in the least developed countries – were already ill-equipped to handle existing waste loads, even before the COVID-19 pandemic led to them to balloon.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/01 Credit-based insurance scores banned
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SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/dj-vu-commissioner-bans-credit-based-insurance-scores-again/LYEJXKWZH5DX5GYE3TPGWH3X3A/
GIST	<p>OLYMPIA, Wash. — After a year of fighting the insurance industry and the legislature, Washington’s Insurance Commissioner continues his all-in assault on getting credit scoring out of insurance.</p> <p>“People are hurting and they need relief,” says Commissioner Mike Kreidler.</p> <p>Last legislative session, the bill he sponsored died.</p> <p>Months later, he temporarily banned the use of credit-based insurance scores in home, auto, and renter’s policies through an emergency rule.</p> <p>New year, new rule.</p> <p>This ban on using credit to calculate insurance premiums would last three years.</p> <p>“Which is very unfair, considering it doesn’t have anything to do with the risk involved of how well you drive a car, or how you maintain your home,” says Kreidler.</p> <p>Kreidler says using credit hurts low-income families, and people of color.</p> <p>And with a pandemic economy, he says now is the time to act.</p> <p>“They were able to write insurance and offer competitive rates before credit scoring. They’ll be able to do it afterwards,” says Kreidler.</p> <p>Insurance industry groups fought Kreidler’s legislative measure and emergency rule. And they’re not happy this time around either.</p> <p>“This is going to be harmful to consumers and it’s deeply disappointing to the Northwest Insurance Council,” says Council President Kenton Brine.</p> <p>Rate changes</p> <p>While the emergency rule was in effect, he says more than a million people saw premiums go up - some by hundreds of dollars.</p> <p>“Particularly hurt were senior citizens on fixed incomes, single parents with a teen driver in the house,” says Brine.</p> <p>And Brine predicts more people may feel the sting of those increasing bills.</p> <p>“Because a lot of policies out there have not renewed yet so they have not seen these new rate increases affecting their insurance rates. Now they will,” says Brine.</p> <p>But Commissioner Kreidler says this rule is revenue neutral, which means there are also thousands of people getting a break.</p> <p>“We’re going ahead full speed, this is something where people are being harmed. We have a chance to help them with this rule today. That we’re not going to back off, we’re going to stick with it,” says Kreidler.</p> <p>So – what’s going on with your premiums?</p> <p>These rates could go into effect by as early as March.</p> <p>Now, we do not know what the insurance industry will do - if they’re going to take Kreidler back to court again.</p>

	<p>We also know there's a bill in the legislature that would stop all of this so that lawmakers could study the use of credit scores and insurance rates for a year.</p> <p>That bill's in the Senate. It has to get out of committee by Thursday. If not, that legislation dies.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/01 Downtown Seattle hires private guards
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/downtown-seattle-association-hires-private-security-guards-amid-police-staffing-issues
GIST	<p>SEATTLE - In response to rising crime and other safety issues, a downtown Seattle group has hired private security guards to do the work police officers aren't able to do amid SPD's staffing crisis. Those guards will help protect Third Avenue between Stewart and Union streets, according to the Downtown Seattle Association.</p> <p>Businesses and locals are claiming this extra security is needed along that stretch of downtown that's overrun by the homeless and drugs.</p> <p>"Tourists, don't go there. Don't walk on Third Avenue. It's not safe," Victrola Coffee Manager Alexa Baehr stated. She's urging people to stay away from the same street where she manages the coffee business. "There was a shooting [nearby] a couple weeks ago."</p> <p>"These people are going into the businesses and stealing from them and police hardly ever come around," Teri Marble from Seattle told KOMO News as she walked near 3rd Ave and Pine St.</p> <p>To help, the DSA is paying unarmed guards from the private security firm Iron and Oak, who have a focus on de-escalation. DSA has been contracting for security patrols for years around the parks they manage, like Westlake Park and Occidental Square. But in an emailed statement, the group says the Iron and Oak patrols are new because they're "filling the gaps in shifts because of SPD staffing issues."</p> <p>Locals have noticed what they're calling a dwindling police presence.</p> <p>"Things have just gone to Hell between the riots, COVID, the shortage. It's all just kind of come together to create this vacuum that enables all of this," Ian Henry of Seattle stated.</p> <p>DSA says it paid about \$314,000 in the last fiscal year for private security, and about \$250,000 to Seattle Police to work overtime there. The group is expecting to dish out even more this year, already doubling the number of private guards from two to four with patrols seven days a week.</p> <p>Baehr says the extra presence from Oak and Iron is needed to help prevent property crime or to keep the homeless from harassing her customers but says more needs to be done to help this area.</p> <p>"I don't think security is going to deter gun violence or drug use," Baehr said.</p> <p>As KOMO has reported, Seattle police lost a few hundred officers since 2020. It has since filled some of those spots, and the city's budget allows for SPD to hire 125 officers this year.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/01 Eastern WA still reeling by summer drought
SOURCE	https://www.krem.com/article/weather/washington-still-hasnt-recovered-fully-summer-drought/293-5ee6b592-02c4-4f8b-a0a1-55fecf5f54b3
GIST	<p>SPOKANE, Wash. — After historically dry conditions across Washington during the Spring and Summer of 2021, the state is having a hard time recovering from that this winter. Drought conditions still remain across half of the state.</p>

	<p>The latest Drought Monitor map has 52% of Washington still under drought conditions with 26% of the state classified as a severe drought. This is much improved from the summer months, but not fully. And while the Winter-Spring is the wetter seasons for the Pacific Northwest, the drought is unlikely to fully recover before the summer of 2022.</p> <p>The Climate Prediction Center's outlook for February doesn't offer any improvement. While precipitation may be near normal, it's likely not enough to lift Spokane out of the moderate drought. And the typically drier areas of southern Washington and the Columbia Basin have even less of a chance.</p> <p>The seasonal outlook, February through April, is more promising. The snowmelt and water content held within is the best chance for the Spokane area and northern Washington to get out of drought conditions which were first onset in Spokane on April 20, 2021. However, southern Washington probably doesn't see full drought removal. The drought in this area has been active since January 2020.</p> <p>Back in early September 2021, Washington hit the peak of the drought with exceptional drought conditions having been reported in the state for the first time in history.</p> <p>Mountain snowfall, a large factor is how the Spring conditions will play out, is currently near average for early February. It's been back and forth between nearly no snow in November, lots of snow in December, and below average in January. February is trending slightly drier than average, but one or two big snow storms could change that easily.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/01 High death rate than other wealthy nations
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2022/02/01/science/covid-deaths-united-states.html
GIST	<p>The ballooning death toll has defied the hopes of many Americans that the less severe Omicron variant would spare the United States the pain of past waves. Deaths have now surpassed the worst days of the autumn surge of the Delta variant, and are more than two-thirds as high as the record tolls of last winter, when vaccines were largely unavailable.</p> <p>With American lawmakers desperate to turn the page on the pandemic, as some European leaders have already begun to, the number of dead has clouded a sense of optimism, even as Omicron cases recede. And it has laid bare weaknesses in the country's response, scientists said.</p> <p>"Death rates are so high in the States — eye-wateringly high," said Devi Sridhar, head of the global public health program at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland, who has supported loosening coronavirus rules in parts of Britain. "The United States is lagging."</p> <p>Some of the reasons for America's difficulties are well known. Despite having one of the world's most powerful arsenals of vaccines, the country has failed to vaccinate as many people as other large, wealthy nations. Crucially, vaccination rates in older people also lag behind certain European nations.</p> <p>The United States has fallen even further behind in administering booster shots, leaving large numbers of vulnerable people with fading protection as Omicron sweeps across the country.</p> <p>The resulting American death toll has set the country apart — and by wider margins than has been broadly recognized. Since Dec. 1, when health officials announced the first Omicron case in the United States, the share of Americans who have been killed by the coronavirus is at least 63 percent higher than in any of these other large, wealthy nations, according to a New York Times analysis of mortality figures.</p> <p>In recent months, the United States passed Britain and Belgium to have, among rich nations, the largest share of its population to have died from Covid over the entire pandemic.</p> <p>For all the encouragement that American health leaders drew from other countries' success in withstanding the Omicron surge, the outcomes in the U.S. have been markedly different. Hospital</p>

admissions in the U.S. swelled to much higher rates than in Western Europe, leaving some states struggling to provide care. Americans are now dying from Covid at nearly double the daily rate of Britons and four times the rate of Germans.

The only large European countries to exceed America's Covid death rates this winter have been Russia, Ukraine, Poland, Greece and the Czech Republic, poorer nations where the best Covid treatments are relatively scarce.

"The U.S. stands out as having a relatively high fatality rate," said Joseph Dieleman, an associate professor at the University of Washington who has compared Covid outcomes globally. "There's been more loss than anyone wanted or anticipated."

As deadly as the Omicron wave has been, the situation in the United States is far better than it would have been without vaccines. The Omicron variant also causes less serious illness than Delta, even though it has led to staggering case numbers. Together, vaccines and the less lethal nature of Omicron infections have significantly reduced the share of people with Covid who are being hospitalized and dying during this wave.

In Western Europe, those factors have resulted in much more manageable waves. Deaths in Britain, for example, are one-fifth of last winter's peak, and hospital admissions are roughly half as high.

But not so in the United States. Record numbers of Americans with the highly contagious variant have filled up hospitals in recent weeks and the average death toll is still around 2,500 a day.

Chief among the reasons is the country's faltering effort to vaccinate its most vulnerable people at the levels achieved by more successful European countries.

Twelve percent of Americans 65 and over have not received either two shots of a Moderna or Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine or one Johnson & Johnson shot, which the C.D.C. considers fully vaccinated, according to the agency's statistics. (Inconsistencies in C.D.C. counts make it difficult to know the precise figure.)

And 43 percent of people 65 and over have not received a booster shot. Even among the fully vaccinated, the lack of a booster leaves tens of millions with waning protection, some of them many months past the peak levels of immunity afforded by their second shots.

In England, by contrast, only 4 percent of people 65 and over have not been fully vaccinated and only 9 percent do not have a booster shot.

"It's not just vaccination — it's the recency of vaccines, it's whether or not people have been boosted, and also whether or not people have been infected in the past," said Lauren Ancel Meyers, the director of the University of Texas at Austin's Covid-19 modeling consortium.

Unvaccinated people make up a majority of hospitalized patients. But older people without booster shots also sometimes struggle to shake off the virus, said Dr. Megan Ranney, an emergency physician at Brown University, leaving them in need of extra oxygen or hospital stays.

In the United States, cases this winter first surged in more heavily vaccinated states in the Northeast before moving to less-protected states, where scientists said they worried that Omicron could cause especially high death tolls. Surveys suggest that the poorest Americans are the likeliest to remain unvaccinated, putting them at greater risk of dying from Covid.

America's Omicron wave has also compounded the effects of a Delta surge that had already sent Covid deaths climbing by early December, putting the United States in a more precarious position than many European countries. Even in recent weeks, some American deaths likely resulted from lengthy illnesses caused by Delta.

But Omicron infections had edged aside Delta by late December in the United States, and epidemiologists said that the new variant was most likely responsible for a majority of Covid deaths in the U.S. today.

“These are probably Omicron deaths,” said Robert Anderson, the chief of mortality statistics at a branch of the C.D.C. “And the increases we’re seeing are probably in Omicron deaths.”

Still, the United States’ problems started well before Omicron, scientists said. Americans began dying from Covid at higher rates than people in western European countries starting in the summer, after the United States had fallen behind on vaccinations. During the Delta surge in the fall, Americans were dying from Covid at triple the rate of Britons.

By tracking death certificates that list Covid as a cause of death or as a contributing factor, Dr. Anderson said, the C.D.C. is able to ensure that it is counting only those people who died from Covid — and not those who might have incidentally tested positive before dying for unrelated reasons.

It is too early to judge how much worse the United States will fare during this wave. But some scientists said there were hopeful signs that the gap between the United States and other wealthy countries had begun to narrow.

As Delta and now Omicron have hammered the United States, they said, so many people have become sick that those who survived are emerging with a certain amount of immunity from their past infections.

Although it is not clear how strong or long-lasting that immunity will be, especially from Omicron, Americans may slowly be developing the protection from past bouts with Covid that other countries generated through vaccinations — at the cost, scientists said, of many thousands of American lives.

“We’ve finally started getting to a stage where most of the population has been exposed either to a vaccine or the virus multiple times by now,” said Dr. David Dowdy, an epidemiologist at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. Referring to American and European death rates, he continued, “I think we’re now likely to start seeing things be more synchronized going forward.”

Still, the United States faces certain steep disadvantages, ones that experts worry could cause problems during future Covid waves, and even the next pandemic. Many Americans have health problems like obesity and diabetes that increase the risk of severe Covid.

More Americans have also come to express distrust — of the government, and of each other — in recent decades, making them less inclined to follow public health precautions like getting vaccinated or reducing their contacts during surges, said Thomas Bollyky, director of the global health program at the Council on Foreign Relations.

A [study published in the scientific journal The Lancet](#) on Tuesday by Mr. Bollyky and Dr. Dieleman of the University of Washington found that a given country’s level of distrust had strong associations with its coronavirus infection rate.

“What our study suggests is that when you have a novel contagious virus,” Mr. Bollyky said, “the best way for the government to protect its citizens is to convince its citizens to protect themselves.”

While infection levels remain high in many states, scientists said that some deaths could still be averted by people taking precautions around older and more vulnerable Americans, like testing themselves and wearing masks. The toll from future waves will depend on what other variants emerge, scientists said, as well as what level of death Americans decide is tolerable.

	“We’ve normalized a very high death toll in the U.S.,” said Anne Sosin, who studies health equity at Dartmouth. “If we want to declare the end of the pandemic right now, what we’re doing is normalizing a very high rate of death.”
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HEADLINE	02/01 Tonga hit by twin disasters in lockdown
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/02/01/world/covid-19-cases-vaccine#tonga-lockdown
GIST	<p>Tonga went into lockdown on Wednesday evening after recording its first community transmission of the coronavirus, weeks after being battered by a powerful volcanic eruption and subsequent tsunami. The eruption shrouded buildings in ash, swamped the island with water, cut off digital communication and prompted an international humanitarian aid effort.</p> <p>Two workers who were helping to distribute aid shipments at the Tongan wharf tested positive for the virus on Tuesday, prompting Prime Minister Siaosi Sovaleni to announce a lockdown that night. Three more positive cases were recorded on Wednesday among relatives of the workers, who are asymptomatic and in quarantine, local news media reported.</p> <p>The outbreak occurred despite efforts by countries and aid groups to deliver relief without direct contact with the island nation, which had managed until now to remain mostly coronavirus free.</p> <p>The initial two cases were detected in Nuku’alofa, the capital, during routine testing of frontline wharf workers, local news media reported.</p> <p>Mr. Sovaleni said at a news conference on Tuesday night that the authorities were in the process of identifying from which ship the transmission had spread.</p> <p>“We are working on it, and we have the record of ships that had been here at a time that could have spread this virus. We are looking at goods that were offloaded,” he said, according to the local newspaper Matangi Tonga.</p> <p>Officials in Australia said the cases were not linked to the Australian Navy ship the H.M.A.S. Adelaide, which has been stranded at Nuku’alofa since last week because of a power outage. The Australian government said that 23 crew members had tested positive for the coronavirus and were in isolation. The vessel had docked to deliver aid, and its cargo was being offloaded by machines, a United Nations spokesman said.</p> <p>Greg Bilton, chief of Australia’s Defense Force, said on Wednesday that the ship had unloaded at a different wharf from the one where the two port employees worked, and that it had done so in a coronavirus-safe way.</p> <p>“I don’t think there’s any connection; there’s no evidence of that,” he told Sky News.</p> <p>Mr. Bilton added that the ship would return to Australia with coronavirus samples so that scientists could help the Tongan authorities identify the virus strain and trace the outbreak.</p> <p>Tonga went into lockdown from 6 p.m. on Wednesday, with schools shut, mass gatherings forbidden and travel banned among the country’s 169 islands. Officials said they hoped that the lockdown, which will be reviewed every two days, would stop transmission between the capital and the other islands.</p> <p>The lockdown is another blow to a nation that is still recovering from the devastating effects of the Hunga Tonga-Hunga Ha’apai volcanic eruption on Jan. 15, which unleashed tsunami waves of up to 50 feet that hit several islands. The eruption damaged the country’s single fiber optic cable. Many residents are still without internet, as repairs are expected to take weeks.</p>

	Tonga previously reported one coronavirus case that emerged in quarantine last October, after the person had arrived on an Air New Zealand flight. The country requires arriving travelers to quarantine for 21 days, and about 60 percent of the population has received two doses of a Covid vaccine.
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HEADLINE	02/01 New Orleans vaccine mandate for students
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/02/01/world/covid-19-cases-vaccine#new-orleans-enacts-a-vaccine-mandate-for-students-but-enforcement-will-wait
GIST	<p>New Orleans became the first major public school district in the country on Tuesday to require that eligible students be vaccinated against the coronavirus, but for now, the effect of the mandate is as much symbolic as it is practical.</p> <p>While the mandate — announced in December — formally took effect on Tuesday, there will be no short-term repercussions for students who haven't complied. They can continue to attend classes in person, subject to a masking requirement that was already in place and applies to vaccinated and unvaccinated students alike.</p> <p>Henderson Lewis Jr., the superintendent of the New Orleans school district, described the mandate as “a call to action.” Now that it is officially in place, he said, school officials can compile comprehensive data on how many students are fully vaccinated, partly vaccinated and unvaccinated — and then work with unvaccinated students to encourage them to get the shot.</p> <p>Dr. Lewis added that the prospect of the mandate, coupled with public vaccination drives, had helped the district increase vaccine uptake. Fifty-six percent of New Orleans children ages 5 to 17 have received at least one dose, up from 33 percent when he announced the requirement in December. Among 12- to 17-year-olds, who have been eligible for the vaccine for longer, 79 percent have received at least one dose.</p> <p>Those numbers are for all children who live in New Orleans, including some who do not attend public schools. Dr. Lewis said the district was working to compile more specific statistics.</p> <p>The mandate calls for all students ages 5 and older to be fully vaccinated, which means getting two doses of the Pfizer vaccine. (That is the only shot authorized for use in Americans under 17, and children under 5 are not yet eligible for any coronavirus vaccine.) However, Louisiana law gives parents wide latitude to opt their children out of vaccination requirements for medical, religious or philosophical reasons.</p> <p>The district is now determining how many unvaccinated students have a waiver and how many are not in compliance.</p> <p>The New Orleans school district — composed mostly of charter schools, which receive public funding but are independently operated — also has a mask mandate and an extensive testing program. The district, which serves about 45,000 students, tested 18,000 students and staff members in the first week of January.</p> <p>Vaccination and masking requirements have been a source of intense, and deeply politicized, debate in many parts of the country. Other school districts have pursued vaccine mandates, but some have backed off in the face of opposition or logistical challenges: Los Angeles, for example, postponed enforcement of its mandate in December.</p> <p>But for the most part, New Orleans, a Democratic enclave in a mostly Republican state, has not seen the sorts of explosive confrontations between parents and school officials that have made headlines elsewhere.</p> <p>A poll released in November by Tulane University's Cowen Institute found that about 66 percent of parents and guardians in New Orleans supported mask mandates for students. Opinions on a vaccine mandate were more closely divided, with 44 percent in support and 48 percent opposed.</p>

	<p>But the poll also found overwhelming support for in-person learning, and Dr. Lewis said the mandate was the most effective means of doing that while also keeping Covid infection rates down.</p> <p>“The vaccines are the best tool that we have to keep the pandemic at bay, for our schools to stay open, and for students to be in school learning the best way,” he said.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/01 Denmark, Norway lift most Covid rules
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/02/01/world/covid-19-cases-vaccine#denmark-lifts-most-covid-rules-despite-soaring-cases
GIST	<p>Norway and Denmark lifted most of their remaining Covid restrictions on Tuesday, doing so even though reports of new coronavirus cases have been rising in both countries.</p> <p>In Denmark, mask mandates are no longer required. Nightclubs will reopen. And it will be up to businesses and venues to decide whether to go on requiring patrons to have health passes showing vaccination or recent recovery.</p> <p>Norway lifted its Covid test requirement for fully vaccinated travelers to enter the country. (Those without proof of vaccination or recent infection must show evidence of a negative P.C.R. or antigen test taken within the 24 hours before departure.) In addition, working from home will no longer be required, and the cap of 10 visitors in private homes is ending, Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Stoere said on Tuesday.</p> <p>The moves come as both countries deal with recent spikes in cases because of the Omicron variant. Neither has seen a corresponding rise in hospitalizations.</p> <p>“Even if many more people are becoming infected, there are fewer who are hospitalized,” Mr. Stoere told a news conference Tuesday. “We’re well protected by vaccines.”</p> <p>The Danish government, meanwhile, has said it no longer considers Covid a “socially critical disease” — a political designation that allows officials to enforce broad measures like business closures and mask mandates — in part because of the country’s high vaccination rate.</p> <p>A mutated version of the Omicron variant known as BA. 2 has been fueling a surge in Denmark, the Statens Serum Institut recently reported, and the country has recently averaged about 44,000 new cases a day, about 70 percent more than two weeks ago. Roughly 80 percent of the population is fully vaccinated and about 60 percent have had an additional dose as well, according to Our World in Data, a project at the University of Oxford.</p> <p>Denmark is among the first European Union members to abandon pandemic restrictions in favor of treating the virus as endemic. Austria ended its Covid rules for unvaccinated people on Monday, and the Netherlands is relaxing the restrictions it adopted in December, which were among the strictest in the bloc.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/01 Schools reconsider ‘test-to-stay’ policies
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/02/01/world/covid-19-cases-vaccine#some-us-schools-are-having-second-thoughts-about-test-to-stay-policies
GIST	<p>The “test-to-stay” policy that was intended to keep more U.S. students in school is on its way out in some states, a casualty of the monthslong Omicron wave that has left school districts struggling to find enough coronavirus tests to meet their needs.</p> <p>Vermont and Massachusetts are turning away from tests that are given in school and sent to labs, in favor of rapid home tests.</p>

[“Test-to-stay,”](#) endorsed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [in mid-December](#), was meant to allow students to stay in classrooms even if a close contact tested positive for the virus, and to restore stability for working parents. Instead of isolating at home, students who were exposed to the virus could keep going to school as long as they were asymptomatic, wore masks and regularly tested negative on rapid coronavirus tests.

The policy also replaced the default plan of quarantining entire classes when there was a positive case among the students.

At the time, the C.D.C. said that at least 12 states had policies that allowed test-to-stay programs: Illinois, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri, New Mexico, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Utah, Vermont and Washington State. Some districts in other states also started their own programs.

Now Vermont is no longer relying on lab-based tests. In Massachusetts, public schools are being [encouraged](#) to concentrate on finding symptomatic people, to use rapid home tests, and to end contact tracing altogether. Gov. Charlie Baker announced last week that districts could follow the new policy as an alternative to test-and-stay.

Dr. Westyn Branch-Elliman, an associate professor at Harvard Medical School who advises the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, said the state’s test-to-stay program, while previously “wildly successful,” no longer made sense. At-home testing of students would be the “wave of the future,” she added.

“Test-and-stay was a great program for the fall of 2021. But now it’s January 2022,” Dr. Branch-Elliman said. “We have vaccines, we have antivirals and we have Omicron. And all of those things mean we have to adjust our policies.”

Earlier this month, New York City [replaced its previous policy](#) of quarantining entire classes that were exposed to the virus with a new policy allowing asymptomatic students who test negative to remain in school. Public schools in the city are providing [rapid at-home tests](#) to students and employees who have symptoms or who were exposed to the virus in a classroom.

The Utah legislature suspended school testing requirements this month after districts said they were unsure whether they would have enough tests to comply. Utah’s state testing sites were overrun in mid-January with a surge of coronavirus cases, and Gov. Spencer Cox called on most people in the state to stop getting tested, even if they had Covid symptoms.

Dr. Adam Hersh, an expert in pediatric infectious diseases at the University of Utah who also advises schools in the state, said the program “was not designed for the conditions of the Omicron surge” that has depleted staff and supplies of tests.

Moving away from test-and-stay is endorsed in updated [guidelines](#) from the PolicyLab at the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia. They suggest that schools stop requiring weekly testing for students and school workers who aren’t showing symptoms, to reduce “excessive burden to school staff and families.” Those who show mild symptoms should consider testing if tests are available.

The Biden administration, which aims to keep schools open, has been working to increase testing nationwide. It [said](#) this month that five million rapid antigen tests and five million P.C.R. lab tests would be provided each month to primary and secondary schools across the country.

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HEADLINE	02/02 Russia clash w/US; lifeline from China
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/02/world/asia/russia-ukraine-china-putin-xi.html

BEIJING — As the United States moves to exert maximal pressure on Russia over fears of a Ukraine invasion, the Russian leader, Vladimir V. Putin, has found relief from his most powerful partner on the global stage, China.

China has [expressed support](#) for Mr. Putin's grievances against the United States and NATO, joined Russia to try to [block action](#) on Ukraine at the United Nations Security Council, and brushed aside American warnings that an invasion would create "[global security and economic risks](#)" that could consume China, too.

On Friday, Mr. Putin will meet in Beijing with China's leader, Xi Jinping, ahead of the opening ceremony of the Winter Olympics that President Biden and other leaders have pointedly [vowed to boycott](#).

Although details of any potential agreements between the two countries have not been disclosed, the meeting itself — Mr. Xi's [first in person with a world leader](#) in nearly two years — is expected to be yet another public display of geopolitical amity between the two powers.

A Chinese promise of economic and political support for Mr. Putin could undermine Mr. Biden's strategy to ostracize the Russian leader for his military buildup on Ukraine's borders. It could also punctuate a tectonic shift in the rivalry between the United States and China that could reverberate from Europe to the Pacific.

"If there's a war over Ukraine, and the Chinese and Russians overtly align with one another, suddenly the world we're in looks like a very, very different one," said Evan S. Medeiros, a professor at Georgetown University who served on the National Security Council during Russia's annexation of Crimea from Ukraine in 2014.

"China will be on the eastern front of what looks like a long-term global competition," he added.

China's leaders have watched the confrontation between Russia and the United States over Ukraine intently, with reports in Chinese state media highlighting the divisions among the NATO allies and criticizing the United States, gleefully at times.

The leadership has viewed the showdown as a test of American influence and resolve that could distract Mr. Biden from his administration's focus on China as the pre-eminent strategic rival of the 21st century. That includes growing American support for Taiwan, the island democracy that China claims as part of its territory.

"In practical terms, China benefits on two fronts," said Alexander Gabuev, an expert on Russia's relations with China at the Carnegie Moscow Center. "First, a major security crisis in Europe will suck up a lot of oxygen that Team Biden needs to address China. Secondly, Russia will move even closer to China — on Beijing's terms."

In Washington, administration officials said they are worried that at the summit meeting in Beijing, Mr. Xi would offer Mr. Putin reassurances of Chinese support if the United States imposes heavy economic penalties on Russia, as the administration has [threatened to do](#).

When the United States imposed similar penalties in 2014 following Russia's annexation of Crimea, Mr. Putin also turned to China as an alternative source of investment and trade, minimizing the impact, at least somewhat. That year, China went ahead and signed a [\\$400 billion gas deal](#) with Russia, though Chinese officials did negotiate favorable prices for their companies since Mr. Putin was in a bind.

Maria Snegovaya, a visiting scholar at George Washington University who co-wrote an [Atlantic Council paper](#) on American sanctions against Russia, said the 2014 events pushed Russia closer to China.

She predicted that China would again help blunt the impact of sanctions, noting that the country is now a big buyer of Russian weapons, fish and [timber](#), and in 2020 it was the [largest importer](#) of Russia's crude oil and natural gas.

“This provides Russia more flexibility in case the West sanctions some of Russia’s exports,” she said. While China has often driven a hard bargain with Russia in the past, the economic ties between the two countries have soared since Russia’s first invasion of Ukraine.

China announced last month that trade with Russia had reached nearly \$147 billion, compared to \$68 billion in 2015, the year after it annexed Crimea and supported separatists in eastern Ukraine. Russia’s ambassador to China, Andrei Denisov, said the two countries could soon complete a deal for a second natural gas pipeline like the one called Power of Siberia, which began flowing in 2019.

Beyond any economic benefits, the two countries have found common cause in trying to weaken American power and influence. Officials and state media in both countries have in recent weeks echoed each other’s attacks on the United States, reflecting an increasingly jaded view of American intentions.

China joined Russia in accusing the United States of fomenting public protests that swept Kazakhstan. Sergei Naryshkin, the director of Russia’s foreign intelligence service and a [hawkish compatriot of Mr. Putin’s](#) when both served in the Soviet K.G.B., said last month that the United States planned “to aggressively and maliciously interfere” in the Olympics in Beijing.

Global Times, a nationalistic newspaper of the Communist Party, seized on the comments [to declare](#) that the plot had been foiled. “Failed attack campaign against Winter Olympics shows incompetence of U.S. government,” a headline declared.

Mr. Xi has met Mr. Putin 37 times as their countries’ leaders, more than any other head of state. In their last meeting, a [virtual summit in December](#), Mr. Xi called him his “old friend,” and the two pledged to build an international political and financial system not dominated by the United States and the dollar.

Chinese officials view Russia’s drive to push back against NATO as a parallel to their own efforts to prevent the United States from building up alliances and partnerships in Asia to counter China.

While there are many differences in the geopolitical situations of Ukraine and Taiwan, Mr. Putin’s [use of historical myths](#) and sheer military power to justify seizing Ukraine has resonance among hawks in Beijing. Mr. Xi, too, has intensified his warnings that Taiwan must never seek independence from a united China under Communist Party rule.

“There is a strong link between the two flash points,” said Artyom Lukin, a professor of international studies at the Far Eastern Federal University in Russia.

One notable difference is that while the United States has flatly said it will not send troops to defend Ukraine, it has maintained “strategic ambiguity” on Taiwan for decades and has left unsaid whether it would come to the armed defense of the island. That ambiguity has helped serve as a deterrent against a Chinese invasion.

China’s diplomatic and rhetorical support is not a blank check for Russia’s designs.

If the United States targets Russia with new sanctions, China could take measured steps in aiding its neighbor. As they did in 2014, Chinese banks and companies would need to calculate whether they could end up being penalized if they do business with any targeted Russian entities. Such penalties would jeopardize their commerce in the United States and elsewhere.

China has also never recognized Russia’s annexation of Crimea, and while the two countries conduct joint military operations, it is highly unlikely that China would ever explicitly support a military intervention.

Only weeks ago, China celebrated the 30th anniversary of an independent Ukraine following the collapse of the Soviet Union. The two nations have strong commercial ties, including in the [defense industry](#).

	<p>Although Chinese officials have made clear that the United States should address Russia’s “reasonable security concerns” in Europe, they have also emphasized the need for a peaceful resolution of the conflict over Ukraine.</p> <p>“Beijing is in the uncomfortable position of seeing one sovereign country invade another sovereign country,” said Derek Grossman, an analyst on Asian security issues at the RAND Corporation. “That flies in the face of noninterference, which China, on paper at least, has assiduously upheld.”</p> <p>Memories also linger of the last Olympics in Beijing, the Summer Games in 2008. During the opening ceremony, news spread that Russian troops had moved into Georgia, another former Soviet republic bristling at Russian interference.</p> <p>“The attitude of the Chinese government is still relatively prudent,” Cheng Xiaohe, a professor of international studies at Renmin University in Beijing, said, “but it mainly shows a cautious attitude on the basis of sympathy and support for Russia.”</p>
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HEADLINE	02/01 Native American tribes’ opioid settlement
SOURCE	https://www.seattlepi.com/news/article/Native-American-tribes-reach-590M-settlement-16822421.php
GIST	<p>Native American tribes have reached settlements over the toll of opioids totaling \$590 million with drugmaker Johnson & Johnson and the country's three largest drug distribution companies, according to a court filing made public Tuesday.</p> <p>The filing in U.S. District Court in Cleveland lays out the broad terms of the settlements with Johnson & Johnson and distribution companies AmerisourceBergen, Cardinal Health and McKesson. Some details are still being hashed out.</p> <p>All federally recognized tribes in the U.S. will be able to participate in the settlements, even if they did not sue over opioids. And there could be settlements between other firms in the industry and tribes, many of which have been hit hard by the overdose crisis.</p> <p>W. Ron Allen, chairman of the Jamestown S’Klallam Tribe in Washington state, called it a big deal for tribes to reach their own settlement, in contrast with tobacco industry deals in the 1990s that left out Native American groups.</p> <p>Allen doesn’t expect his tribe of about 550 people to get much from the settlement, but it will help in its efforts to build a healing center that will address opioid addiction, he said.</p> <p>“Every penny counts, so we’ll take it and run with it,” he said.</p> <p>One study cited in the settlement found that Native Americans have had the highest per capita rate of opioid overdose of any population group in 2015.</p> <p>“The dollars that will flow to tribes under this initial settlement will help fund crucial, on-reservation, culturally appropriate opioid treatment services,” Douglas Yankton, chairman of the Spirit Lake Nation in North Dakota, said in a statement.</p> <p>More than 400 tribes and intertribal organizations representing about 80% of tribal citizens have sued over opioids.</p> <p>New Brunswick, New Jersey-based Johnson & Johnson — whose opioids included Duragesic and Nucynta but which has stopped selling opioids — said in a statement Tuesday that the settlement is not an admission of liability or wrongdoing.</p>

AmerisourceBergen, based in Conshohocken, Pennsylvania, said in a statement that the deal will expedite help for communities and let the company focus on the pharmaceutical supply chain.

Cardinal, based in Columbus, Ohio, and McKesson, based in Irving, Texas, declined to comment.

Under the deal, Johnson & Johnson would pay \$150 million over two years. AmerisourceBergen McKesson and Cardinal would contribute \$440 million in total over seven years.

Each of the 574 federally recognized tribes could decide whether to participate but would be required to use the money to deal with the opioid epidemic.

The deal would take effect when 95% of the tribes with lawsuits against the companies agree to the settlement, said Tara Sutton, a lawyer whose firm is representing 28 tribes.

Settlements are also in the works between tribes and other companies involved in opioids, Sutton said.

The newly announced deals are separate from a \$75 million one the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma and the three distribution companies reached last year ahead of a trial.

The same four companies are nearing the final stages of approval of settlements worth \$26 billion with state and local governments across the U.S. They have until later this month to decide whether enough government entities have signed on to continue in the deal.

The money for tribes will come out of the larger settlements.

The tribal settlements are part of about \$40 billion worth of settlements, penalties and fines rung up over the years by companies over their role in opioids.

The drugs, including both prescription drugs such as OxyContin and illicit ones including heroin and illegally made fentanyl, have been linked to more than 500,000 deaths in the U.S. in the past two decades.

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HEADLINE	02/01 Boeing cut 1,000 jobs last year, now hiring
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/boeing-aerospace/another-1000-boeing-jobs-lost-in-wa-last-year-but-unions-hope-for-upswing-in-2022/
GIST	<p>Though Washington state lost just over 1,000 Boeing jobs last year, the jet manufacturer after three years of crisis may have hit bottom. It's hiring again.</p> <p>Boeing has lined up 737 MAXs painted in the livery of Chinese airlines at Boeing Field in anticipation of resuming deliveries there. And the production rate on the MAX assembly line in Renton is set to increase, boding well for Machinists union jobs.</p> <p>Meanwhile, Monday's launch of a new airplane, the 777-8F cargo plane that must be designed and certified in the next five years, bodes well for engineering jobs.</p> <p>Boeing spokesperson Jessica Kowal said Tuesday the company has advertised about 5,000 job openings in the state.</p> <p>"There's a huge effort to hire people," she said.</p> <p>"Boeing's Washington state employment has stabilized and remains our largest workforce anywhere in the world," Kowal added.</p>

Bill Dugovich, spokesperson for the Society of Professional Engineering Employees in Aerospace, or SPEEA, said Boeing's white-collar union anticipates "a steady uptick but not a rush" in hiring of engineers and technical staff.

"We're hopeful we hit the bottom a while ago and are on the upswing," Dugovich said. "Particularly with the announcement of the new freighter, we're hoping things turn around."

Connie Kelliher, spokesperson for the blue-collar International Association of Machinists, said Boeing is holding new hire orientation events for mechanics every Friday, with nearly 80 people at last week's session, many of them recalled from layoff, and close to 60 more set to attend Friday.

Those signs of life follow more than two years of job cuts as Boeing plumbed the bottom of the downturn in its business.

Starting in 2019, Boeing management slashed jobs at the commercial airplane unit in response to successive crises: the MAX crashes and the prolonged grounding of that jet; the historic pandemic aviation downturn; and the continuing halt in 787 deliveries due to manufacturing quality issues.

Two years ago, Boeing employed nearly 72,000 people in the state. Now it's less than 56,000. In 2020, Boeing cut 20,000 jobs companywide, almost 15,000 of those in Washington state.

Boeing's just-released annual employment figures show that in 2021, Boeing added back 568 jobs companywide, though it shed another 1,085 jobs in Washington state.

Boeing cut a lot of Washington jobs in the first six months of 2021, then started hiring back mechanics here as MAX production picked up.

Kelliher said the Machinists union started the year with 31,100 members at Boeing, hit a low point in May of 23,500, and then recovered in the months that followed to end the year with just over 24,800 members.

In contrast, Dugovich said SPEEA's membership, which had plummeted by nearly 2,900 in 2020, was reduced by less than 200 last year. SPEEA now has just over 14,100 members.

The new hires didn't compensate for the losses early in 2021, bringing Boeing employment in this state down to 55,823 at year-end.

Across the Boeing enterprise, some regions lost jobs in 2021 while others gained.

Washington state lost more jobs than any other state, though it suffered just a 2% cut this time versus a 21% cut in 2020.

Boeing South Carolina shed 185 jobs last year, just over 3% of its workforce. And Missouri, home to Boeing's military jet fighter plants, shed 553 jobs, or 3.6% of its workforce.

Texas, where Boeing is working on two new Air Force One jets in San Antonio and where the aftermarket services division is headquartered near Dallas, gained 715 jobs.

California, home to Boeing space facilities and the base for its airline support unit, added 435 jobs.

The largest job growth was not in any of the U.S. states where Boeing has large manufacturing facilities: 1,400 jobs were added in a category listed as "Other," which includes overseas locations such as Russia and India.

In contrast to the MAX production ramp-up in Renton, the prospect at Boeing's widebody jet plant in Everett is much more muted.

	<p>Production of the 747 jumbo jet there, already at a snail's pace, will stop completely in October.</p> <p>Assembly of the 787 Dreamliner was transferred to South Carolina. There is work in Everett now repairing the quality defects on the previously built 787s, but once those go out the door that line is done.</p> <p>The 767 assembly line continues at a steady but slow pace, building freighters and Air Force tankers at a rate of three per month.</p> <p>One recent brighter note is that the 777 assembly line, which had been slowed to two jets per month, is buoyed by freighter orders, and so it's set to increase this year to three jets per month.</p> <p>The good news for Washington state is that at least there should be no more cuts.</p> <p>In a statement, Boeing said, "We are actively hiring in engineering and manufacturing and are holding several recruiting events in the near future."</p>
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HEADLINE	02/01 SPD cops 'failed to de-escalate' in shooting
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/seattle-police-failed-to-de-escalate-before-shooting-man-to-death-on-waterfront-spd-watchdog-says/
GIST	<p>Two officers who shot and killed a man who was carrying a knife as he walked along Seattle's waterfront last year failed to first try to defuse the situation or use other defensive strategies before resorting to using deadly force, Seattle's police watchdog announced Tuesday.</p> <p>In turn, the Office of Police Accountability recommended suspensions for each officer — identified by the Police Department as Cassidy Butler and Willard Jared — for violating the department's "de-escalation" policy during the fatal encounter in February 2021 with 44-year-old Derek Hayden along Alaskan Way.</p> <p>The officers "engaged in tactics and decision-making that increased the odds that force would be used and, more concerning, failed to ensure time, distance, or shielding" between themselves and Hayden when they confronted him after responding to a scene where multiple officers already had arrived, according to a 12-page summary of the OPA investigation released Tuesday.</p> <p>"This caused the breakdown of the plan employed by the (other) officers on scene and ultimately resulted in the fatal shooting of" Hayden, the summary says.</p> <p>The OPA investigation stopped short of finding the officers broke any rules for shooting at Hayden, however, ruling the allegations they violated the department's use-of-force policy as "non-sustained."</p> <p>Butler and Jared were not named in the OPA report made public. But both were identified in disciplinary records separately released by the department Tuesday that showed interim Chief Adrian Diaz upheld the OPA findings and recommendations, imposing a one-day suspension without pay against Butler and a three-day suspension without pay against Jared, the more senior officer.</p> <p>In the records, known as Disciplinary Action Reports, or DARs, Diaz directly assessed each officer's actions, finding both had "undercut the core component of de-escalation" by interceding in a large police response at the scene and emerging in front of Hayden with their weapons drawn.</p> <p>"The Subject had not threatened anyone but himself," Diaz wrote to each officer. "Time would have allowed the situation to evolve, it would have given the officers more opportunity to build a rapport with the Subject and to call in more resources."</p>

Mike Solan, president of the Seattle Police Officers' Guild which represents the officers, declined to comment about the OPA investigation on Tuesday.

Friends and relatives of Hayden, who has been described as a well-liked, Seattle University graduate student who was studying computer science, have said they didn't recognize his mental health troubles before his fatal encounter with police.

"It just really highlights the fact of how the system doesn't always work right," Jason Trammell, Hayden's cousin, said at a vigil after his death. "I wish there were some warning signs or something that could have been done to end it differently. I think as a society we need to keep up with other ideas."

Around 9:20 p.m. on Feb. 16, 2021, two Port of Seattle police officers encountered a man, later identified as Hayden, walking with a large butcher knife near Alaskan Way and Seneca Street, [according to audio of the 911 call](#). The man approached the officers, put the knife to his own neck, and told them: "I need help, I need you to kill me," according to the OPA summary.

After requesting assistance from Seattle police, five city officers responded and began developing a tactical plan while keeping a safe distance from Hayden, who had ambled toward Pier 55. As one of the Port officers was equipped with a 40 mm launcher that fires foam-tipped projectiles, Seattle police asked that officer to take the lead, the OPA summary states.

About that time, Jared and Butler, riding together in a squad car, arrived on scene and parked ahead of where Hayden was walking on the sidewalk, the summary says. Jared emerged from the car with his patrol rifle, Butler with her sidearm, and Jared ordered Hayden to stop. Instead, Hayden stepped off the sidewalk, walked toward the officers, raised the knife and said: "Do it, please, just shoot me," the summary states.

Both officers fired at Hayden, though Butler "did not appear to hit the Subject with any of her shots," the summary says. Jared fired at Hayden about five seconds after he started advancing toward the officers, the OPA found.

The department's Force Investigation Team, which was called to the scene to investigate the shooting, later referred the case to OPA, alleging Jared and Butler "left the safety of their car, confronted the suspect and ultimately shot and killed him."

"There was no exigency requiring immediate intervention by the officers, and no crime had occurred," according to the referral, as recounted in the OPA summary. "The officers appear to have violated the de-escalation policy by failing to utilize time, distance and shielding to reduce the chance of using force."

Both officers later told OPA investigators they feared Hayden was posing a danger to the public by brandishing a knife, despite the fact that no pedestrians or traffic were seen in the immediate vicinity. The officers also said they felt they'd stopped a safe distance away, but were forced to shoot when Hayden advanced aggressively and failed to heed their commands to stop.

After reviewing video footage and conducting multiple interviews, OPA concluded the officers "failed to engage in any planning or tactical discussions prior to using force."

"When they came into the path of Mr. Hayden with firearms drawn, this eliminated time, which the investigation report refers to as the most crucial factor of de-escalation," the OPA added in a statement Tuesday.

The investigation also concluded the officers were within policy to shoot Hayden in defense after he came toward them, knife raised.

The investigation summary cited another case — the [May 2020 fatal shooting of Terry Caver](#), in which an internal investigation also found officers used inappropriate tactics and failed to de-escalate an encounter

	<p>with a man with a knife — in re-issuing a policy recommendation aimed at reforming how police respond to individuals armed with knives.</p> <p>The department, in a statement Tuesday, said it also has “supplemented its training and resources over the past year, including updated edged-weapon de-escalation training and, with the support of community and accountability partners, a program to equip officers with the BolaWrap, an additional tool for interrupting a threat of harm at a safer distance.” The device discharges a cord that restrains its target.</p> <p>Other past fatal encounters between Seattle police and people with knives or other edged weapons include the 2010 shooting of John T. Williams, a First Nations woodcarver, whose case prompted federal oversight of the department that remains ongoing; and last month’s confrontation with a burglary suspect, who was shot to death on a Beacon Hill street after fatally stabbing a police dog unleashed on him by a pursuing officer.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/01 Putin: US, NATO ‘ignored’ Russia concerns
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/02/01/world/russia-ukraine-news#putins-public-remarks-today-could-be-his-first-on-ukraine-since-december
GIST	<p>MOSCOW — Addressing the Ukraine crisis for the first time since December, President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia said on Tuesday that the United States and NATO had “ignored” Russian concerns in their responses to Kremlin demands, a fresh signal that Moscow and the West remain far apart key issues involving security in Eastern Europe.</p> <p>The Kremlin’s spokesman, Dmitri S. Peskov, told reporters that Russian officials were still drafting a formal response to American security proposals aimed at de-escalating the Ukraine crisis, and that they would be ready as soon as Mr. Putin “sees fit.”</p> <p>But Mr. Putin, at a news conference with Prime Minister Viktor Orban of Hungary, said it was clear “that the principal Russian concerns turned out to be ignored.”</p> <p>The Kremlin has demanded that NATO not expand eastward, guaranteeing that Ukraine will never join the alliance, and that NATO draw down forces in Eastern European countries that were once part of the Soviet Union or under its domination. American and European officials have dismissed such demands as non-starters.</p> <p>Russia has massed more than 100,000 troops near Ukraine’s borders, and could be preparing for an invasion, U.S. and NATO officials have warned. Mr. Putin and people close to him have said publicly that Ukraine, with its longstanding political and cultural ties to Russia, is not a legitimate country.</p> <p>Russian officials have denied any plans to attack Ukraine even as Mr. Putin himself kept silent on the matter. Mr. Putin last addressed the issue on Dec. 23, when he took a combative tone at his annual news conference in response to a British journalist who asked whether he would guarantee that Russia would not invade Ukraine.</p> <p>“It was the United States that came with its missiles to our home, to the doorstep of our home,” Mr. Putin said. “And you demand from me some guarantees. You should give us guarantees. You! And right away, right now.”</p> <p>Amid the mixed messaging, Russia has continued to mass troops around Ukraine, including in Belarus to the north. Russia says the troops gathering in Belarus will be taking part in snap military exercises from Feb. 10-20.</p> <p>The United States and NATO submitted written responses to Russia’s demands last week. Russian officials said afterward that Mr. Putin was studying the responses. He warned in December that Russia would take unspecified “military-technical” measures if the West did not satisfy those demands.</p>

	<p>Mr. Putin's meeting Tuesday with Mr. Orban was part of a flurry of diplomacy aimed at defusing the crisis. Before meeting the Hungarian leader, Mr. Putin spoke by telephone on Tuesday to Prime Minister Mario Draghi of Italy, who warned that a "worsening of the crisis" would produce "serious consequences," the Italian prime minister's office said.</p> <p>Mr. Putin may also speak in the coming days to Prime Minister Boris Johnson of Britain, Mr. Peskov said. And after two phone calls between Mr. Putin and President Emmanuel Macron of France in recent days, Russian and French officials were preparing an in-person summit to be held "in the near future," Mr. Peskov said.</p> <p>Top Russian and American diplomats conferred on Tuesday. And a Russian diplomat met with counterparts from Ukraine, France and Germany in Paris last week to try to jump-start the peace process for eastern Ukraine that the four countries hammered out in Minsk, Belarus, in 2015. The four officials are scheduled to meet again in Berlin this month.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/01 Ukraine president praises West support
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/02/01/world/russia-ukraine-news#ukraines-president-praises-support-from-the-west-as-leaders-shuffle-through-kyiv
GIST	<p>KYIV, Ukraine — President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine opened a new session of Parliament on Tuesday by calling for unity in the country, offering assurance that its economy was stable, and praising the enormous show of diplomatic and military support from Ukraine's allies.</p> <p>One thing he did not mention: Russia and its buildup of troops on Ukraine's borders.</p> <p>For weeks, Mr. Zelensky has tried to play down the threat posted by the military buildup even while welcoming a host of visiting foreign dignitaries, many of whom view the threat as very real.</p> <p>On Tuesday, Mr. Zelensky is scheduled to meet with Prime Minister Boris Johnson of Britain, whose government has pursued a more muscular role in the showdown between Europe and Russia. Britain has supplied Ukraine with anti-tank missile systems and other weapons, and last month made the unusual decision to publicize intelligence about an alleged Russian plot to install a pro-Moscow government in Kyiv.</p> <p>Last month, Mr. Johnson gave an ominous speech in which he warned that Ukraine faced the danger of renewed invasion from "a large and powerful country massing troops and tanks on the border."</p> <p>"If the worst happens and the destructive firepower of the Russian army were to engulf Ukraine's towns and cities, I shudder to contemplate the tragedy that would ensue," Mr. Johnson said.</p> <p>Though wary of what Mr. Zelensky has described as overhyped warning about a Russian invasion, the Ukrainian leader and his government have made clear that the military support pouring into Kyiv is welcome and have urged Ukraine's allies to do more. In the last week and a half, six cargo jets carrying 500 tons of American-donated military equipment and ammunition have arrived in Kyiv, and more are on the way, Ukraine's defense minister, Oleksii Reznikov, wrote on Twitter on Tuesday.</p> <p>And last month the United States authorized Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania to send anti-tank Javelin missiles and antiaircraft Stingers to Ukrainian forces. Ukrainian generals say, however, that severe gaps in the country's military capabilities leave little hope of mounting a serious defense against Russia's overwhelming air superiority.</p> <p>Coming to Kyiv to address the guns arrayed on Ukraine's borders is something of a respite for Mr. Johnson, who has been under a different kind of siege at home. A scandal over apparent violations of Covid-19 lockdown rules by Mr. Johnson and his staff at the height of the pandemic has threatened to cut his tenure short.</p>

	<p>Tuesday's visits were part of a flurry of diplomatic activity aimed at reassuring Ukraine that it has a seat at the table while more powerful countries engage in high-stakes diplomacy with Russia. In his speech on Tuesday, Mr. Zelensky said there had been about 80 visits from representatives of foreign governments and international organizations in recent weeks, including by two U.S. congressional delegations and Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken.</p> <p>The visits may themselves have a deterrent effect. Speaking to reporters on Monday, Dmytro Kuleba, Ukraine's foreign minister, said the "parade of visits" by foreign dignitaries to Kyiv was part of a strategy to stave off attack — the theory being that Mr. Putin would be less likely to begin a military offensive if a foreign leader were in town.</p> <p>Mr. Zelensky also plans to host visits by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey and Prime Minister Mark Rutte of the Netherlands.</p> <p>Still, Mr. Kuleba cautioned that the string of visits was no guarantee of restraint by Russia, saying, "Who knows what is in Putin's head?"</p>
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HEADLINE	02/01 US: embassy families in Belarus to leave
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/02/01/world/russia-ukraine-news#us-embassy-staff-belarus
GIST	<p>With large-scale Russian military exercises set to begin in Belarus, the United States has ordered the departure of family members of U.S. government employees, citing "an increase in unusual and concerning Russian military activity near the border with Ukraine."</p> <p>The decision comes just over a week after the State Department pulled the families of American diplomats out of Ukraine in response to the buildup of Russian troops on the border. In a statement published Monday, the State Department also warned U.S. citizens planning travel to Belarus that "the situation is unpredictable."</p> <p>Although Russia insists that its military exercises pose no threat to Ukraine, which shares a 665-mile border with Belarus that is largely unguarded, the United States has warned that they could be used as a pretext to prepare for a possible attack. Ukraine's capital, Kyiv, is a short drive from Belarus's southern border and is easily within range of the rocket systems Russia has deployed before the exercises.</p> <p>Russia has deployed some of its most advanced and well-equipped forces to nine bases and airfields around Belarus, the Russian Defense Ministry says. Already, highly trained special forces units and airborne troops, together with powerful anti-aircraft systems and hundreds of aircraft, have begun to arrive at bases around the country, Ukrainian and Western officials say. At least two Iskander-M rocket battalions have been sent to Belarus, equipped with rockets that can hit anywhere inside Ukraine, Konrad Muzyka, a Russian military analyst, said on Twitter.</p> <p>The exercises, named Allied Resolve-2022, are unnerving not only Ukraine, but also NATO countries like Poland and the Baltic nations along Belarus's western border.</p> <p>On Tuesday, Russia's defense ministry published a video showing a Russian military field camp newly deployed on the border with Poland. The camp is equipped with a hospital, classrooms for soldiers and recreation facilities, an indication that Russian troops, as Western officials fear, could be deployed to the area for longer than just the duration of the exercises, which are scheduled to end on Feb. 20.</p> <p>In remarks at the United Nations Security Council on Monday, the American ambassador, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, said that as many as 30,000 Russian troops could be deployed for the exercises, adding to what she called the largest mobilization of troops in Europe in decades.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/01 Ukraine army not up to NATO caliber
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/01/world/europe/ukraine-army-nato-russia.html
GIST	<p>POPASNA, Ukraine — The soldiers live in dugout bunkers, and cook all their own meals. They dry their wet socks on clotheslines underground. Many of their weapons are remnants of the Soviet era, half a century old.</p> <p>In the icy trenches of eastern Ukraine, where government troops are fighting Russian-backed separatists, one of the critical issues in the standoff between Russia and the West — should Ukraine be allowed to join NATO? — seems hardly pressing or even relevant: Little about the day-to-day activities of Ukrainian soldiers suggests the kind of sophisticated, contemporary military that distinguishes NATO members.</p> <p>“You dig a hole, then you sleep in that damned hole,” said Pvt. Yuri Todorchuk, who is 53, summing up service in the Ukrainian army in the east. “Even younger men have sore backs” from all the digging, he said.</p> <p>President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia has massed about 130,000 troops on Ukraine’s border, stoking fears of an imminent invasion by an upgraded and lethal Russian fighting force. And he has insisted to the United States and Western Europe that Ukraine must never be allowed to join NATO, a demand the West has rejected.</p> <p>But several days of observation at the front lines last week showed the grinding, relatively low-tech tactics of the Ukrainian army. Hard-pressed for soldiers, the military now admits enlisted men up to age 57 on three-year contracts. It has been reforming and re-arming but remains almost wholly focused on the manpower-intensive trench fighting in the east, a decidedly old-fashioned form of war.</p> <p>The eight men in one small unit, Lima squad, part of a mechanized brigade of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, arrived at their position in June and set about digging, soldiers said.</p> <p>They burrowed out their underground homes — two sleeping quarters, each with four bunks; a subterranean kitchen; and a room for steam baths — and have lived in these cavelike spaces since.</p> <p>Above ground, plastic sheeting claps in a freezing wind. With separatist trenches close by, in a tree line across a snowy field, the only truly safe place is underground.</p> <p>Nothing about the unit suggests a connection to NATO other than the name, Lima, which is the NATO phonetic alphabet designation for the letter L. Under an overhaul as part of Ukraine’s aspiration to join the alliance, military units were renamed according to NATO standards.</p> <p>The conflict is fought mostly with rifles, machine guns, rocket propelled grenades, mortars and artillery systems dating to the 1970s or earlier. The United States has sold Javelin anti-tank missiles to Ukraine since 2018, but they are intended mainly to repel a broad Russian attack, not for use on the front. Turkey provides another of the country’s newer weapons, the Bayraktar TB2 armed drone, but the Ukrainian military has acknowledged using it only once in combat, last October.</p> <p>Still, military analysts say the force is in far better shape than in 2014, when Russia annexed the Crimean Peninsula and fomented the war in the east. The United States has provided \$2.7 billion in military assistance in the years since. In recent weeks, it authorized Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia to send American-made Stinger anti-aircraft missiles to Ukraine, and Britain has provided guided anti-tank missiles.</p> <p>And the Ukrainian army is battle hardened. About 400,000 Ukrainian soldiers, including about 13,000 women, have gone through rotations along the eastern front, providing a pool of veteran fighters who might be called up in the event of war. On Tuesday President Volodymyr Zelensky signed an order declaring his intention to add 100,000 troops to Ukraine’s military over three years, and increase soldiers’ pay.</p>

But multiple rotations have also taken a heavy toll, soldiers in this position, who range in age from 25 to 59, said. Pvt. Volodymyr Murdza, 53, is halfway through his second three-year contract. His son is also serving in the war and his wife worries terribly, he said. “She calls and says, ‘I worry because you don’t call me,’” Private Murdza said. “And I say, ‘Dearest, sunshine, I call whenever I can.’”

The closeness of the lines is a continual source of unease, Private Murdza said. Just two days earlier, a soldier from another unit serving in a position 100 or so yards away was wounded from shrapnel from a mortar, after the Russian-backed separatists apparently ascertained its location.

So, in the pre-dawn, three soldiers in Lima squad awoke for an operation to prevent a similar setback in their small maze of trenches.

The orders were to fire a heavy machine gun from a position where it is not typically stationed. The soldiers described opening up with the gun as a routine necessity, to mislead the other side about the location of their positions, and prevent an attack. Neither side observed repeated political announcements of cease-fires. The most recent cease-fire announcement came last week, after diplomatic talks between Russia, France, Germany and Ukraine in Paris.

“Are you ready?” one of the soldiers asked, pulling back a lever to load the gun. “It’s happening now.” It was 3 a.m.

With that, a small, log-framed dugout filled with the roar of the 50-caliber machine gun, muzzle flashes and acrid smoke. A few bursts of a dozen or so bullets each were fired.

In the distance, across the pitch-black, fallow farm field that separates the two sides, answering volleys rang out. But the shots went wide, flying overhead dozens of yards from the Ukrainian dugout. A radio crackled. Then it was silent again, except for the crunch of Ukrainian soldiers’ footsteps in the snow as they returned to their usual position.

The level of violence has ebbed and flowed over the eight years of war in eastern Ukraine, but it has mostly been a low-intensity conflict.

Deployments that last six to eight months are hard, but so are leaves at home, said Pvt. Roman Leskiv, 30, the commander of Lima squad, who has been serving in the east since the war started.

“It feels stifling; people don’t understand me,” said Private Leskiv, explaining that after so many years at the front he has trouble assimilating to life away from it. “Vacation is the hardest part of the year for me.”

But seeing only the faces of the same half-dozen other men, for months on end, also grates on his nerves.

A few years ago, he married a nurse who had treated him in hospital after a shrapnel wound, but they divorced.

“She asked, ‘When will you come home?’” said Private Leskiv, sitting by the wood fire in the unit’s kitchen, running a hand over a scar on his scalp underneath his buzz-cut hair. “And I said, ‘Soon, soon, soon.’ But soon never happened.”

Dr. Oleksandr Astrakhantsev, the doctor assigned to the larger unit that Lima squad reports to, treats battle wounds, mostly from shrapnel, but also everyday ailments of men in their 50s living in rough circumstances. “In these conditions, any problem becomes more acute,” from stress to lack of sleep, he said.

Psychological difficulties also arise. “When you see the same faces every day, and every day nothing changes, it can get you down,” said Dr. Astrakhantsev. Soldiers recede into themselves, stop talking.

	“We used to call it Afghan syndrome,” he said. “Everybody out here has it. Even if a soldier goes home, a part of him stays out here in the east.”
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HEADLINE	02/01 As US pulls back, China leans into Mideast
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/01/world/middleeast/china-middle-east.html
GIST	<p>BEIRUT, Lebanon — In January alone, five senior officials from oil-rich Arab monarchies visited China to discuss cooperation on energy and infrastructure. Turkey’s top diplomat vowed to stamp out “media reports targeting China” in the Turkish news media, and Iran’s foreign minister pressed for progress on \$400 billion of investment that China has promised his country.</p> <p>As the United States, fatigued by decades of war and upheaval in the Middle East, seeks to limit its involvement there, China is deepening its ties with both friends and foes of Washington across the region. China is nowhere near rivaling the United States’ vast involvement in the Middle East. But states there are increasingly looking to China not just to buy their oil, but to invest in their infrastructure and cooperate on technology and security, a trend that could accelerate as the United States pulls back.</p> <p>For Beijing, the recent turmoil in neighboring countries like Afghanistan and Kazakhstan has reinforced its desire to cultivate stable ties in the region. The outreach follows the American military’s withdrawal from Afghanistan after 20 years, as well as the official end of its combat mission in Iraq. That, along with the Biden administration’s frequent talk of China as its top national security priority, has left many of its partners in the Middle East believing that Washington’s attention lies elsewhere.</p> <p>Beijing has welcomed the chance to extend its influence, and Arab leaders appreciate that China — which touts the virtue of “noninterference” in other countries’ affairs — won’t get involved in their domestic politics or send its military to topple unfriendly dictators. And each side can count on the other to overlook its human rights abuses.</p> <p>“There is a feeling in the region that the United States is actively on the way out, and that’s an opportunity for China,” said Gedaliah Afterman, head of the Asia Policy Program at the Abba Eban Institute of International Diplomacy at Reichman University in Israel.</p> <p>China’s interest in the Middle East has long been rooted in its need for oil. It buys nearly half of its crude from Arab states, with Saudi Arabia topping the list, and it is sure to need more as its economy, the world’s second largest, keeps growing.</p> <p>But in recent years, China has also been investing in critical infrastructure in the region and making deals to supply countries there with telecommunications and military technology.</p> <p>Chinese state-backed companies are eyeing investments in a maritime port in Chabahar, Iran. They have helped to finance an industrial park in the port of Duqm, Oman, and to build and operate a container terminal in Abu Dhabi, the United Arab Emirates’ capital, as well as two new ports in Israel.</p> <p>Such moves reflect Beijing’s view of the Middle East as crucial to its Belt and Road Initiative, a sweeping plan to build international infrastructure to facilitate Chinese commerce.</p> <p>China hopes to link markets and supply chains from the Indian Ocean to Eurasia, making the Persian Gulf region “a really important hub,” said Jonathan Fulton, a nonresident senior fellow for Middle East programs at the Atlantic Council.</p> <p>In its business-focused dealings in the region, China has not directly confronted the United States. But it often promotes itself as an alternative partner for countries that question Washington’s model of development, or its history of political and military interventions.</p>

“At a time when United States is facing ups and downs in its domestic and foreign policies, these countries feel that China is not only the most stable country, but also the most reliable,” said [Li Guofu](#), a researcher at the China Institute of International Studies, which is overseen by the Chinese Foreign Ministry.

China’s main interests in the region are economic, but its growing ties have also brought it political dividends. Middle Eastern states have stayed mum on issues like Beijing’s [quashing of political freedoms in Hong Kong](#) and its [menacing moves toward Taiwan](#).

Perhaps more surprisingly, given their majority-Muslim populations, almost none have publicly criticized China’s forced internment and indoctrination of its [Muslim Uyghur minority](#), which the United States has [deemed genocide](#). Some Arab states have even deported Uyghurs to China, ignoring concerns that they could be tortured or killed.

Abduweli Ayup, a Uyghur activist in Norway, said two Chinese citizens had been detained in Saudi Arabia after one called for violent resistance to China’s repression. The two men were told they would be returned to China, Mr. Ayup said. Their current whereabouts are unknown.

Mr. Ayup said he knew of individual Uyghurs who had been deported from Egypt, the United Arab Emirates and other Arab states. He said five were sent to China from Saudi Arabia, which has historically portrayed itself as a defender of Muslims worldwide.

“They are not servants to the two holy places,” Mr. Ayup said, referring to the Saudi king’s official title as overseer of Islam’s holiest sites. “They are servants to the Chinese Communist Party.”

Of China’s recent diplomatic visitors from the region, only the Turkish foreign minister, Mevlut Cavusoglu, raised the issue of the Uyghurs, according to official accounts of the meetings.

For Middle Eastern countries, the benefits of the relationship are clear: China promises to be a long-term buyer of oil and gas and a potential source of investment, without the political complications involved in doing business with the United States.

Beijing deals with governments that Washington spurns. Syria, whose leaders are under heavy sanctions for atrocities committed during its civil war, just joined the Belt and Road Initiative. And Iran has become heavily reliant on China since the United States withdrew from the international deal to restrict Iran’s nuclear program and reimposed sanctions that have crippled its economy.

But China’s most extensive regional ties are with the Arab oil giants of the Gulf, led by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

China is the largest trading partner of many countries in the region, and they expect it to buy more of their oil and gas as the United States, which under the Biden administration has sought to shift away from fossil fuels, buys less. Last year, trade between China and the Gulf States exceeded \$200 billion for the first time, and cooperation has expanded to new realms.

Bahrain and the Emirates were the first countries to approve Chinese-made coronavirus vaccines, and the Emirates partnered with Chinese companies to produce them.

In China’s official summaries of the January meetings, the warmest praise was reserved for Saudi Arabia, which China called a “good friend,” “good partner” and “good brother.” On Wednesday, top defense officials from China and Saudi Arabia [held a virtual meeting](#) to discuss ways to deepen the countries’ military ties.

The Emirates, which wants to increase its standing as a tech and financial hub, is particularly interested in Chinese companies. “There are a lot of Chinese tech firms that are now at the cutting edge that are trying to go global, and they can’t go into the United States or Europe because of regulations,” said [Eyck Freymann](#), a doctoral candidate in China studies at Oxford University.

He gave the example of SenseTime, a Chinese company that has been criticized by rights groups and [blacklisted by the United States](#) for supplying Beijing with [technologies used to profile Uyghurs](#). That has not deterred Arab customers: In 2019, SenseTime opened a regional headquarters in Abu Dhabi.

“In every Middle Eastern country, their public security bureau wants that, and the Chinese are offering that product,” Mr. Freymann said.

The United States has tried to block some Chinese moves into the region, particularly infrastructure upgrades by the telecoms giant Huawei, which Washington warns could facilitate Chinese espionage. Some Arab countries have struck deals with Huawei anyway.

Over time, analysts say, China’s aversion to regional politics and conflict could hinder its outreach to the Middle East, rife as it is with wars, uprisings and sectarian tensions. China has made no effort to emulate the American security presence there, and the United States’ Arab partners have tried to engage with China in ways that do not alienate Washington.

“The Gulf States have been careful to balance their approach to ensure that growing ties with China do not antagonize their main security guarantor, the United States,” said Elham Fakhro, a visiting scholar at the Center for Gulf Studies at Exeter University.

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HEADLINE	02/01 Beijing Olympic Covid cases in athletes
SOURCE	https://globalnews.ca/news/8585519/beijing-olympic-covid-cases-in-athletes/
GIST	<p>Athletes and team officials are testing positive for COVID-19 at much higher rates than other people arriving in China for the Beijing Olympics, organizers said Tuesday.</p> <p>Figures released by local organizers showed 11 positive tests for COVID-19 among 379 athletes and officials arriving Monday. They have been taken into isolation hotels to limit the spread of the infection and could miss their events.</p> <p>The positive test rate of 2.9 per cent for athletes and officials compared to 0.66 per cent for Olympic “stakeholders,” a group which includes workers and media, in the same period.</p> <p>There were 1,059 people in that category.</p> <p>Over a three-day period from Saturday through Monday, the positivity rate for athletes and officials was 40 per cent higher than other Olympic arrivals.</p> <p>The rates were confirmed in PCR and other follow-up tests for tens of thousands of people at the Beijing Olympics who will live, work and train in closed-off communities separated from the general public. The Chinese government is pursuing a zero-tolerance public health strategy.</p> <p>On Monday, the rate of infection from tests of those already inside the Olympic bubbles was 100 times higher for athletes and officials compared to workers. Five of 3,103 tests from the athletes-officials group were positive compared to only one of more than 60,000 daily tests from “stakeholders.”</p> <p>A total of 200 positive tests for COVID-19 have now been recorded at the Olympics since Jan. 23. Of those 200, 67 were athletes and officials. “Stakeholders” accounted for the other 133.</p> <p>Among the athletes testing positive in Beijing is Hong Kong skier Audrey King, who arrived from a training camp in Bosnia-Herzegovina. King told the South China Morning Post she had no symptoms and was optimistic of skiing in the women’s slalom on Feb. 9.</p>

The most senior athlete representative at the International Olympic Committee, two-time Olympic hockey medalist Emma Terho, also is in an isolation hotel after testing positive on arrival.

“Even though this is not the start I envisaged, I was happy to see the protocols that Beijing 2022 has put in place are working well,” Terho, an IOC member from Finland who sits on the Olympic body’s executive board, wrote on her Instagram account.

The Canadian Olympic Committee also said on Tuesday that three members of the Canadian team in Beijing were in COVID-19 protocols.

The 414-member Canadian delegation includes athletes, coaches and team staff.

The trio of Canadians are impeded in “their ability to fulfil their role at Games,” the COC said in a statement.

“We are managing each one on a case-by-case basis and to respect the privacy of the people involved we will not be sharing names at this time,” the COC said.

“Part of our strategy was to arrive early to allow time for confirmation testing and, if necessary, the medical expert panel process to unfold.”

The COC announced last Friday that five members of the delegation were in protocol.

The organization won’t name Canadians in protocol unless an athlete who is unable to compete because of a positive test wants that information public.

Athletes who tests positive in China must produce two negative tests 24 hours apart to be released from isolation.

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HEADLINE	02/01 Def. Sec. rejects Guard vaccine exemptions
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/01/us/national-guard-vaccine-mandate.html
GIST	<p>Lloyd J. Austin III, the defense secretary, has written a letter to seven Republican governors, rejecting their requests for exemptions from coronavirus vaccination mandates for their states’ National Guard troops.</p> <p>The rejection — sent to the governors of Alaska, Oklahoma, Texas, Idaho, Mississippi, Nebraska and Wyoming, who have all sought to allow their guard troops to refuse the vaccine without consequences — sets the stage for a potential legal battle.</p> <p>“In making the decision to require vaccination against Covid-19 for service members,” Mr. Austin wrote: “I considered the thousands of hospitalizations and the hundreds of deaths among service members, civilians, and their families related to Covid-19. Covid-19 takes our service members out of the fight, temporarily or permanently, and jeopardizes our ability to meet mission requirements.”</p> <p>“Failure by a member to do so will lead to a prohibition on participation in drills, training, and other duty conducted under Title 32 and will jeopardize the member’s status in the National Guard,” Mr. Austin added.</p> <p>Federal officials have long said that governors have no legal standing to allow Guard members to refuse to comply with the military’s vaccine mandate. State officials and some legal experts, however, believe that unless National Guard members are federally deployed, they are under the jurisdiction of the governor of their state and therefore not subject to federal mandates. It will be up to the governors to see how far they wish to push this dispute.</p>

	<p>Roughly 97 percent of the 1.3 million active-duty service members in the United States military have had at least one dose of a coronavirus vaccine, but the proportion is much lower for the Guard and Reserve, who still have time to comply before their deadline later this year. The deadlines for active-duty forces passed late last year, with fewer than 100 members of the military being separated for failure to comply. Not a single soldier in the Army, for instance, has left so far over refusal to get a shot.</p> <p>Exemptions from the mandate have been few in number, and often temporary. Two members of the U.S. Marine Corps were recently given religious exemptions from the Pentagon's vaccine mandate, the first of their kind since the mandate was announced last summer.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/02 More countries easing Covid restrictions
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-business-health-pandemics-united-nations-ca046d38f7e78ad7150a0a8d95d81433
GIST	<p>GENEVA (AP) — Late-night disco partying. Elbow-to-elbow seating in movie theaters. Mask-free bearing of faces in public, especially in Europe and North America: Bit by bit, many countries that have been hard-hit by the coronavirus are opening up and easing their tough, and often unpopular, restrictive measures aimed to fight COVID-19 even as the omicron variant — deemed less severe — has caused cases to skyrocket.</p> <p>The early moves to relax such restrictions evoke a new turning point in a nearly two-year pandemic that has been full of them.</p> <p>Omicron, the Geneva-based World Health Organization says, has fueled more cases — 90 million — in the world over the last 10 weeks than during all of 2020, the outbreak's first full year. WHO acknowledges some countries can judiciously consider easing the rules if they boast high immunity rates, strong health care systems and favorable epidemiological curves.</p> <p>Omicron is less likely to cause severe illness than the previous delta variant, according to studies. Omicron spreads even more easily than other coronavirus strains, and has already become dominant in many countries. It also more easily infects those who have been vaccinated or had previously been infected by prior versions of the virus.</p> <p>But the U.N. health agency, ever leery about how a virus still spreading widely might evolve, warned about underestimating omicron.</p> <p>“We are concerned that a narrative has taken hold in some countries that because of vaccines — and because of omicron's high transmissibility and lower severity — preventing transmission is no longer possible and no longer necessary,” WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said at a regular WHO briefing on the pandemic on Tuesday. “Nothing could be further from the truth.”</p> <p>His emergencies chief, Dr. Michael Ryan, said some countries could justifiably begin easing restrictions, but warned about a rush to the exits and advised that countries assess their own situations. He cautioned that “political pressure will result in people in some countries opening prematurely — and that will result in unnecessary transmission, unnecessary severe disease, and unnecessary death.”</p> <p>The most pronounced pullbacks are popping up in Europe, for many months the world's epicenter of the pandemic, as well as in South Africa — where omicron was first announced publicly — and the United States, which has tallied both the most cases and deaths from COVID-19 of any single country.</p> <p>Britain, France, Ireland, the Netherlands and several Nordic countries have taken steps to end or ease their COVID-19 restrictions.</p>

Last week, England ended almost all domestic restrictions: Masks aren't required in public and vaccine passes are no longer needed to get into events or other public venues, while the work-from-home order has been lifted. One lingering condition: Those who test positive still have to self-isolate.

On Tuesday, Norway lifted its ban on serving alcohol after 11 p.m. and the cap on private gatherings to no more than 10 people. Travelers arriving at the border no longer will be required to take a COVID-19 test before entry. People can sit elbow-to-elbow again at events with fixed seating, and sports events can take place as they did in pre-pandemic times.

"Now it's time for us to take back our everyday life," Norwegian Health Minister Ingvild Kjerkol said Tuesday. "Tonight, we scrap most measures so we can be closer to living a normal life."

As throughout the pandemic, many countries are going their own way: Italy has tightened its health pass requirements during the omicron surge. From Monday, its government requires at least a negative test within the previous 48 hours to enter banks and post offices, and anyone over age 50 who hasn't been vaccinated risks a 100-euro fine.

Other continents are being even more cautious. Some of the world's highest vaccination rates are found in Asia — which is no stranger to earlier outbreaks like SARS and MERS — and its leaders are holding to stricter lockdown measures or even tightening them, for now.

The Pacific Rim nation of Tonga was entering a lockdown Wednesday evening after finding coronavirus infections in two port workers helping distribute aid arriving after a volcanic eruption and tsunami. That came against fears that the fallout from the natural disaster last month could spark a second disaster by bringing the pandemic into a nation that had been virus-free.

On the eve of hosting the Winter Olympics, China was sticking to its formal zero-COVID-19 policy even as 85% of its population is fully vaccinated, according to Our World in Data figures. Beijing imposes strict lockdowns and quarantines quickly when any cases are detected, and continue to require people to wear masks on public transportation and show with "green" status on a health app to enter most restaurants and stores.

Thailand, where 69% of the population is fully vaccinated, according to Our World in Data, continues to require masks be worn in public and enforces social distancing, as well as other restrictions.

Singapore, which boasts Asia's highest rate of vaccination with 87% with at least two shots, is maintaining its restrictions even as it heads along a "transition journey to a COVID-19 resilient nation" begun in August, with steps to both relax and tighten rules as conditions warrant.

With nearly 80% of its people fully vaccinated, Japan has resisted mandated restrictions but continues exhorting the public to wear face masks and observe social distancing practices, while requesting restaurants to shorten opening hours. Cambodia, with 81% of its people vaccinated, has dropped restrictions on restaurants and other businesses but still requires masks to be worn in public and encourages social distancing.

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HEADLINE	02/01 WHO: omicron surge; cases soar
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/10-weeks-omicron-surge-covid-cases-soar-82602476
GIST	<p>GENEVA -- The World Health Organization chief said Tuesday that 90 million cases of coronavirus have been reported since the omicron variant was first identified 10 weeks ago — amounting to more than in all of 2020, the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic.</p> <p>With many countries easing their restrictive measures amid public fatigue about them, WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus cautioned that omicron should not be underestimated even though it</p>

has shown to bring less severe illness than earlier variants — and cited "a very worrying increase in deaths in most regions of the world."

"We are concerned that a narrative has taken hold in some countries that because of vaccines — and because of omicron's high transmissibility and lower severity — preventing transmission is no longer possible and no longer necessary," he told a regular WHO briefing on the pandemic.

"Nothing could be further from the truth," Tedros added. "It's premature for any country either to surrender or to declare victory. This virus is dangerous and it continues to evolve before our very eyes."

WHO said four of its six regions worldwide are seeing increasing trends in deaths.

Many European countries have begun easing lockdown measures, including Britain, France, Ireland and the Netherlands. Finland will end its COVID-19 restrictions this month.

On Tuesday, Denmark's government scrapped most restrictions aimed at fighting the pandemic, saying it no longer considers COVID-19 "a socially critical disease." The nation of 5.8 million has in recent weeks seen more than 50,000 new cases a day, but the number of patients in intensive care units has declined.

"Now is not the time to lift everything all at once. We have always urged — always urged — caution in applying interventions as well as lifting those interventions in a steady and in a slow way, piece by piece," said Maria Van Kerkhove, WHO's technical lead on COVID-19.

Dr. Michael Ryan, the WHO emergencies chief, said countries with higher vaccination rates "have more choices" about whether to ease their restrictions, but said they should assess factors like their current epidemiology, at-risk populations, immunity in the population, and access to health care tools to fight the pandemic.

Speaking to countries' governments, he said: "Every country has to find its feet, know where it is, know where it wants to go, and chart its path ... You can look at what other countries are doing. But please don't just follow blindly what every other country is doing."

Ryan expressed concern that "political pressure will result in people in some countries opening prematurely — and that will result in unnecessary transmission, unnecessary severe disease, and unnecessary death."

Meanwhile, Van Kerkhove also said a group of experts that was set up last year to look into the emergence of new pathogens like the coronavirus — and assess its origins — is expected to issue a report "in the coming weeks." She said the group, known by the acronym SAGO, has held about a half-dozen meetings since its first one in late November.

She said the group would, among other things, look at early epidemiological studies and "our current understanding of the origins of this particular pandemic, building upon previous missions that have gone to China and worked with Chinese scientists." She alluded to the work of another WHO-led team that traveled to China, where the pandemic first emerged, and reported on the outbreak in March last year.

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HEADLINE	02/01 Canada anti-vaccine protest spurs outrage
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/anti-vaccine-protest-canada-spurs-outrage-82602011
GIST	<p>TORONTO -- In a scene at odds with Canadians' reputation for niceness and rule-following, thousands of protesters railing against vaccine mandates and other COVID-19 restrictions descended on the capital over the weekend, deliberately blocking traffic around Parliament Hill.</p> <p>Some urinated and parked on the National War Memorial. One danced on the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. A number carried signs and flags with swastikas.</p>

In the aftermath of Canada's biggest pandemic protest to date, the demonstrators have found little sympathy in a country where more than 80% are vaccinated. Many people were outraged by some of the crude behavior.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau called the Ottawa protesters a “fringe minority” and said they reflected the proliferation of “disinformation and misinformation online, conspiracy theorists, about microchips, about God knows what else that go with the tinfoil hats.”

Organizers, including one who has espoused white supremacist views, had raised millions for the cross-country “freedom truck convoy” against vaccine mandates. It attracted support from former U.S. President Donald Trump and Tesla billionaire Elon Musk.

Trudeau and his family were moved to an undisclosed location during the protest. (Two of his children tested positive for COVID-19, and a test Monday revealed he, too, was infected. He said he is fine and working remotely.)

A smaller but still significant number of protesters remained on the streets on Tuesday, saying they won’t leave until all vaccine mandates and other restrictions are gone. They are also calling for the removal of Trudeau's government, though it is responsible for few of the measures, most of which were put in place by provincial governments.

“It’s time for Canada and the rest of the world to find other ways to deal with this virus,” said protester Michelle Kloet, 47, of Canmore, Alberta.

During the demonstration, the statue of Terry Fox, a national hero who lost a leg to bone cancer as a youngster and set off in 1980 on a fundraising trek across Canada, was draped with an upside-down Canadian flag and a sign that read “Mandate freedom.”

“My kids were shocked. Like all Canadian young people, they have grown up with Terry Fox as a hero,” Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland said. “This is not the Canada who we want to be. And I really proudly believe, and I know, this is not what Canada is.”

Ontario Premier Doug Ford said he was “extremely disturbed” to see people “desecrate our most sacred monuments and wave swastikas and other symbols of hate and intolerance.”

The outburst was seen as so out of character for Canada that one U.S. scientist felt compelled to apologize for what he portrayed as America's influence.

“Canada gave us kindness, tolerance, poutine and hockey, and in turn we exported this awful fake health freedom movement linked to far right extremism that caused so much senseless loss of life in America and now might do the same there,” tweeted Dr. Peter Hotez, an infectious-disease specialist at the Baylor College of Medicine in Texas. “Our apologies.”

Many of the demonstrators refused to wear masks in hotels, malls and grocery stores. One homeless shelter reported protesters had demanded it feed them.

Ottawa Police Chief Peter Sloly said several investigations are underway and a tip line for hate crimes, threats and assaults related to the demonstration has been set up. Sloly said one person had been arrested in connection with the protest.

Tim Abrey, a Ph.D. candidate, said he was assaulted by “so-called freedom fighters” while taking pictures of the protest in his neighborhood.

The most visible contingent of protesters were truck drivers who parked their big rigs on Parliament Hill. Some of them were protesting a rule that took effect Jan. 15 requiring truckers entering Canada to be fully immunized against the coronavirus.

The Canadian Trucking Alliance has estimated that 85% of truckers in Canada are vaccinated.

Meanwhile, police on Tuesday moved to end a protest convoy of trucks and other vehicles that had been blocking a major U.S. border crossing in Coutts, Alberta, since Saturday. It turned violent after some protesters breached police barriers to join the demonstration, authorities said.

"I've received reports in the last hour of people aligned with the protesters assaulting RCMP officers, including one instance trying to ram members of the RCMP, later leading to a collision with a civilian vehicle," Alberta Premier Jason Kenney. "This kind of conduct is totally unacceptable. Without hesitation, I condemn those actions and I call for calm."

Some opposition Conservative lawmakers attended the protest in Ottawa, and Conservative Party leader Erin O'Toole, who is facing a revolt among his lawmakers, met with some of the truckers.

Phil Haggart, a counter-protester, said he was there to show that there are voices in favor of public health measures.

"Masks are important, vaccines are important, and mandates are important only because we need them to stay alive and not fill our hospitals up," he said.

A surge of the highly contagious omicron variant has led to record cases and lockdowns in Ontario and Quebec, Canada's most populous provinces. Vaccine mandates imposed by the provincial governments remain in place.

But restaurants reopened Monday with 50% capacity, and Quebec's premier, Francois Legault, announced Tuesday he is abandoning his threat to tax the unvaccinated, saying the proposal has divided Quebecers.

"I have to protect the health of Quebecers, but I also have to protect the peace in our society," Legault said.

Nelson Wiseman, a political science professor at the University of Toronto, said the misinformation rabbit hole in Canada is not as deep as it is in the U.S. for many reasons, including less political polarization north of the border.

"This leads to much less sympathy for or tolerance of the unvaccinated among Canadians. Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis could not get very far in Canada. A Donald Trump would be shunned, even in Conservative Party circles," Wiseman said.

He added: "The protesters in Ottawa have not aided their cause as the demonstration drags on."

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HEADLINE	01/02 Dry Jan. less water than normal Calif. snow
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Technology/wireStory/dry-january-means-water-normal-california-snow-82611408
GIST	<p>SACRAMENTO, Calif. -- The water contained in California's mountain snow is now lower than the historical average after a January without significant rain or snow — a dramatic reversal from December that demonstrates the state's challenges in managing its water supply.</p> <p>Snow totals updated Tuesday by the state Department of Water Resources show the amount of water in the Sierra Nevada mountain's snowpack is at 92% of what's normal for this date. In December, heavy rain and snow left the state with 160% of its average snow water content.</p>

"Our climate is experiencing these volatile shifts from wet to dry year after year, and even month after month," said Sean de Guzman, manager of the department's snow surveys and water supply forecasting section.

The extremely wet December followed by a dry January was strikingly similar to previous months, which included a very wet October followed by a dry November.

De Guzman spoke from a location near Lake Tahoe where the state periodically measures snow pack. Snow totals there were slightly higher than average, indicating the varying conditions across the state. It's one of hundreds of locations where the state manually and electronically measures snow totals and water content.

The whipsaw effects of the weather and precipitation were illustrated by the situation on the Nevada side of Lake Tahoe in Reno, which had zero precipitation the entire month of January for the first time in recorded history. That came months after the city experienced its wettest October since the National Weather Service began keeping records in 1893.

California needs a wet winter to ease the drought because much of the state's precipitation typically falls between December and March. Most of California is now in what's considered severe drought according to the U.S. Drought Monitor, with only a small part of the state classified as being in the more serious extreme drought. That's a significant improvement over the situation a year ago.

Winter snow is a crucial part of California's water supply and December through March are typically the wettest months of the year. Snow that melts in the mountains and runs down into California's lower elevations makes up about a third of the state's water supply.

As of now, the water content in the snow is at 57% of the April 1 average, a key measurement data that indicates how much water the state will have from runoff in the spring and summer.

"That one dry month of January basically wiped out whatever head start we had as we head towards the end of winter," de Guzman said.

Meanwhile, officials at the State Water Resources Control Board announced Tuesday that Californians met Gov. Gavin Newsom's call for a voluntary 15% reduction in water use for the first time in December, thanks to the heavy precipitation. Overall people used 16.2% less water compared to the December before. Still, cumulative savings since Newsom made his request in July sit at just 7.4%, officials said.

E. Joaquin Esquivel, chair of the water board, called the December conservation numbers "incredibly impressive" and said they demonstrate that people are being more mindful of their water use during wet times. The state board recently adopted mandatory water restrictions including a ban on watering lawns within 48 hours of a rainstorm, but that rule wasn't yet in effect in December.

But he stressed that continued conservation is necessary as dry conditions have returned.

"We're looking to hopefully get a few more storms this water year, but the storm door may be closed," he said.

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HEADLINE	02/01 Kremlin critics remain undaunted
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/kremlin-critics-stay-undaunted-yearlong-crackdown-82618003
GIST	<p>MOSCOW -- The prison sentence imposed a year ago on leading Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny was a severe blow to Russia's opposition — and then the situation got worse.</p> <p>Over the past 12 months, scores of activists, independent journalists and rights advocates were targeted with raids, detained and designated as terrorists and foreign agents.</p>

“Legal opposition politics in Russia ended almost entirely,” said Irina Fatyanova, former head of Navalny's office in St. Petersburg, who has fled the country.

The setbacks began when Navalny was arrested in January 2021 upon returning from Germany, where he spent five months recovering from nerve-agent poisoning he blames on the Kremlin. His jailing triggered Russia's largest wave of protests in years, followed by mass detentions.

Then on Feb. 2, 2021, a court ordered Navalny to serve 2½ years in prison over parole violations stemming from a 2014 suspended sentence in a fraud case Navalny insists was politically motivated.

The multi-pronged crackdown on dissenting voices was unprecedented in post-Soviet Russia.

"Repressions have always been used during Putin's tenure, but they were supplementary" to other efforts that targeted the political process directly, such as elections and propaganda, political analyst Abbas Gallyamov said. "The situation drastically changed last year."

In recent weeks, the government has again turned up the heat on Navalny and his team, adding him and his associates to the state registry of terrorists and extremists and petitioning to imprison his brother.

The authorities on Tuesday also ordered independent media outlets to take down dozens of stories based on Navalny's multiple exposures of corruption among government officials.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov has insisted that no prosecutions in Russia are politically motivated.

Initially, Gallyamov said, the pressure on opposition activists and media outlets critical of the Kremlin was turned up because of the September 2021 parliamentary election, which was widely seen as key to Putin's effort to cement his hold on power.

After the vote went the Kremlin's way, the authorities saw no reason to stop tightening the screws on dissent. "It's easy to get the steamroller of repressions rolling. It's hard to stop it," Gallyamov said.

Navalny's associates, especially those who announced they were running for parliament, faced a flurry of criminal charges during the period preceding the election.

His closest allies, Ivan Zhdanov and Leonid Volkov, who had left the country, were put on a wanted list in connection with multiple criminal charges. In March, Zhdanov's father, a former municipal official in Russia's northern Nenets region, was arrested on abuse-of-office charges widely seen as politically motivated.

Oleg Stepanov, former head of Navalny's office in Moscow, had to run his campaign for the State Duma from under house arrest after he was charged with violating coronavirus regulations by calling for unauthorized protests over Navalny's arrest. The case also ensnared Navalny's brother Oleg, spokeswoman Kira Yarmysh, longtime ally Lyubov Sobol and several other activists.

Stepanov could communicate with the outside world only through his girlfriend and his lawyers. He was eventually barred from the race, just like the vast majority of opposition candidates, and handed parole-like restrictions in the virus-related case.

Sobol, who also sought refuge abroad, counted four criminal cases against her in 2021.

"I was convicted in two criminal cases. Two more were launched against me. I was deemed a member of an extremist group. My team was pushed out of the country, and some two months I spent under house arrest," she said.

In the most crushing blow to Navalny's team, authorities outlawed the Foundation for Fighting Corruption and its nearly 40 regional offices across the country in June 2021. The designation as an extremist organization exposed associates and supporters to prosecution and barred them from running for public office.

Several former coordinators of the regional offices were detained on extremism charges late last year.

Stepanov left Russia after the election to study and hoped to return after getting a degree, but the arrest of one of the regional coordinators made him rethink that.

"I underestimated the risk and left temporarily, but now I understand that it is for an indefinite amount of time," he said. He was put on a wanted list last week.

Other opposition groups suffered similar troubles. Open Russia, financed by Russian tycoon and Putin critic Mikhail Khodorkovsky, disbanded in late May, fearing persecution of its members under a law that bans "undesirable" organizations. Several days after the group ceased to exist, its leader, Andrei Pivovarov, was jailed.

Authorities charged him with running an "undesirable" organization, even though Open Russia had ceased to exist by the time a case against Pivovarov was opened. If convicted, he could spend up to six years in prison.

Tatyana Usmanova, a close ally of Pivovarov and former campaign manager in his run for the State Duma last year, said the scale of the crackdown was hard to anticipate.

But as pressure mounted on Navalny's organizations, it became clear that the authorities "fear those who can rally hundreds, thousands, tens of thousands of people and coordinate them somehow, direct them at something," Usmanova said.

The crackdown also extended to dozens of media outlets, individual journalists and rights groups. They were labeled "foreign agents" — a designation that invites excessive government scrutiny and connotations that discredit the recipient. Some were also declared undesirable or accused of ties with undesirable organizations.

Four independent news sites shut down, and at least two rights groups disbanded.

Separately, at the end of 2021, Russia's Supreme Court shut down Memorial, the country's oldest and most prominent human rights organization, citing violations of the foreign agents law.

Meduza, Russia's most popular independent news outlet based in Latvia, was the first in 2021 to receive the foreign agent designation. Alexei Kovalev, its investigative editor, said the outlet immediately started losing advertisers and sources.

Just like other organizations with the same designation, Meduza was obligated to put a cumbersome 24-word disclaimer in large print disclosing its status as a foreign agent on every piece of content it produces. Absence of the disclaimer might result in crippling fines.

Meduza managed to rally a hefty crowdfunding campaign among its readers. As the list of foreign-agent media grew, the designation started to lose its power, Kovalev said.

Advertisers who want to reach "a quality audience" will have to advertise in a foreign-agent outlet "because there are no longer any non-agents out there," he said.

Opposition activists refuse to admit defeat. Sobol told The Associated Press that members of Navalny's team "still make it work," despite being persecuted and chased out of the country.

	<p>“We post investigations. We do organizational work, and we see a strong support in the Russian society that hasn’t shrunk,” she said.</p> <p>Usmanova said activists from Open Russia continued their efforts even after the group ceased to exist — some ran in local elections, others campaigned for various causes.</p> <p>It would be impossible for authorities to stifle all critical voices, especially on the internet and social media and with growing awareness of the country's dire situation, Usmanova said.</p> <p>“Even in the Soviet Union,” she said, “they failed to throw all those who dissented into prison and silence them.”</p>
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HEADLINE	02/02 Hunger crisis looms in Nigeria ‘food basket’
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/hunger-crisis-looms-nigerias-food-basket-amid-conflict-82618397
GIST	<p>AGATU, Nigeria -- It's 2 p.m. and Hannah Mgbede asks her husband if she can take her first break of the day from threshing rice so she can breastfeed their 18-month-old baby girl fastened to her back during the grueling work.</p> <p>Her husband Ibrahim Mohammed, 45, used to harvest as many as 10 bags of rice a year from his farm. But that dropped to just three bags after attackers burned his home to the ground a few years ago, as violence between farmers and herders escalated across the northwest and central parts of Nigeria.</p> <p>With that decreased yield, Mohammed hasn't made enough money to buy seedlings to grow yams, soybeans and guinea corn (sorghum).</p> <p>“Sometimes we manage to eat once (a day),” says Mohammed, who has three children, aged five and younger. “Since the crisis, it is only by the grace of God we are feeding to remain alive.”</p> <p>Here in Benue state, harvests of rice, yams and soybeans were once so bountiful that it was called the “food basket of Nigeria.” But waves of violence over the last several years have reduced crops in the northcentral state of Africa's most populous nation.</p> <p>More than 1 million farmers in the state have been displaced because of the intercommunal violence between herders and farmers competing for water and land, say officials.</p> <p>“We are heading to a food crisis,” Benue state Gov. Samuel Ortom told The Associated Press.</p> <p>Across northern Nigeria, at least 13 million are now facing hunger amid a lean season, according to the U.N. World Food Program. The violence has also disrupted the sales of food as roads are too unsafe for farmers to transport crops and marketplaces have been razed by attackers.</p> <p>Rice production has dropped so much that its price has jumped more than 60% in Benue state as well as some other parts of the country.</p> <p>"There is a very real risk of famine because both conflict and COVID-19 has made it harder to reach those most in need," a spokesperson of the U.N. agency told AP.</p> <p>Thousands of Nigerians have been killed in the decades-long clashes between agrarian communities and nomadic cattle herders who are fighting over limited access to water and grazing land. The farmers often accuse the herders of encroaching in their fields while the herders, mostly from the Fulani ethnic group, claim the croplands are their traditional grazing routes.</p>

	<p>The government has now launched an initiative under the National Livestock Transformation Plan in the hope of resolving the conflict which has been worsened by the proliferation of arms and the government's failure to prosecute past perpetrators from both groups.</p> <p>About 3,000 people who have fled the violence in Benue state are now living at a camp in Guma local government area.</p> <p>Mtonga Iliamgee, 43, says every day is a struggle to feed her family of 10. She was seen preparing their only meal of the day at 1 p.m.</p> <p>“We live for the day and we don’t know what tomorrow could bring,” she says.</p> <p>Felix Agune, the deputy head of the camp school, says some children come to class crying that they've had no breakfast. Non-government organizations are trying to fill the gap but it is “nothing compared to the massive hunger spread across Benue state,” said Rex Elanu, a program director for the One to One Healthcare Initiative.</p> <p>Government officials insist they are working to make farmlands safe enough for people to return and work the land. They're also trying to encourage nomadic herders to take up ranching so they are less at odds with farmers.</p> <p>Seeds and fertilizers have also been supplied to farmers in the past to enhance food production, cushion the effect of the pandemic and encourage more youths to go into agriculture, according to a spokesman of the agriculture ministry.</p> <p>Despite the violence, Nigerian farmers have been able to produce enough crops to keep the country self-sufficient in staples such as rice, cassava and yams.</p> <p>“Nigeria survived with the produce generated by the smallholder farmers,” Theodore Ogaziechi of the agriculture ministry said. “The farmers are doing their utmost best to feed the nation.”</p> <p>Farmers are resilient but also afraid because some who have attempted to go back to their farms have been killed, warned Ortom, the governor of Benue state.</p> <p>“If there is security for these farmers, we’ll continue to retain our position as the food basket of the nation,” he said. “But if nothing is done, as it is now, it is a big challenge.”</p>
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HEADLINE	02/01 Firefighters retreat in fertilizer plant blaze
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/north-carolina-firefighters-pull-back-blaze-fertilizer-plant/story?id=82599355
GIST	<p>A fire at a North Carolina fertilizer plant packed with 600 tons of highly explosive ammonium nitrate continued to burn out of control on Tuesday, forcing firefighters to abandon the scene and prompting the evacuation of roughly 6,500 residents in a mile radius of the facility, officials said.</p> <p>The blaze at the Weaver Fertilizer Plant in the north ward of Winston-Salem was also belching noxious fumes in the air that the local fire chief described as having the odor of spent fireworks and casting a haze over the city of more than 250,000 people.</p> <p>The fire was first reported around 6:45 p.m. on Monday and quickly spread throughout the facility, triggering multiple explosions as firefighters raced to the plant, witnesses said.</p> <p>No injuries have been reported.</p>

Winston-Salem Fire Chief William "Trey" Mayo said during a news conference Tuesday morning that fire crews were only able to battle the blaze for about 90 minutes before conditions grew too hazardous to keep firefighters at the scene.

"So, we decided to abandon the firefighting operation and pull out crews back due the risk of the products that are on site at this facility," Mayo said.

He said a major concern is the amount of potentially explosive chemicals at the plant, including 500 tons of ammonium nitrate in a storage building and another 100 tons in a rail car next to the building. He said there is an additional 5,000 tons of finished fertilizer stored at the plant.

Asked by reporters how close the flames were to the ammonium nitrate, Mayo responded, "all of it is in the line of fire."

Stressing how volatile the situation is, Mayo referenced the April 17, 2013, ammonium nitrate explosion at the West Fertilizer Company in West, Texas, that killed 15 people and leveled 150 buildings.

"The quantity of ammonium nitrate they had on hand was 240 tons. When this fire began last night, we had 600 tons on site," Mayo said. "So, if that doesn't convey the gravity of this situation and how serious folks need to take it, I don't know how else to verbalize that."

Fire officials said earlier Tuesday that water was still being routed to an area of the facility where the ammonium nitrate is being stored in an attempt to keep that section under 400 degrees, which they believe will prevent explosions.

Mayo said firefighters reported hearing several "mini explosions" before they had to retreat.

Mayo said fire officials have been using drones to monitor the blaze and are hoping to send up a fire department hazmat specialist in a North Carolina Highway Patrol helicopter to do more reconnaissance on the conflagration.

He said five strike teams were in position to move in and resume battling the fire as soon as conditions improve, but he added that most first responders were being kept out of a the 1-mile radius danger zone for the time being.

Mayo said about 2,500 homes are within a mile radius of the plant and that about 6,500 people living within the area have been advised to evacuate.

Winston-Salem Mayor Allen Joines said Tuesday morning that the estimated length of the evacuation will likely be extended.

"We have to be very concerned about the noxious air and fumes coming out of the site as we go forward," Joines said.

Mayo said environmental teams are monitoring the air outside the evacuation zone. He said the threshold for air conditions immediately dangerous to life and health is 100 parts per million of nitrous oxide, and that crews are recording readings of about 65 parts per million of nitrous oxide.

"So, we are not at an immediately dangerous to life and health threshold," said Mayo, adding that people with respiratory issues should stay inside with their doors and windows closed.

Capt. Matthew Smith of the North Carolina Hazardous Materials Regional Response Team 5 said experts have advised him that the threat of more explosions is expected to last up to 36 hours.

"We're not to go anywhere near it for 36 hours," Smith said.

	<p>Asked if an investigation is underway into the cause of the fire, Mayo said, "We're not anywhere near that point in this event."</p> <p>He said fire department officials last inspected the plant for code violations on Dec. 21 and that no violations were found.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/01 Major winter storm across wide swath of US
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/winter-storm-bring-snow-ice-wide-swath-us-82597789b
GIST	<p>AUSTIN, Texas -- Airlines canceled hundreds of flights Tuesday, governors urged residents to stay off roads and schools closed campuses as a huge swath of the U.S. braced for a major winter storm that was set to put millions of Americans in the path of heavy snow and freezing rain.</p> <p>The approaching blast of frigid weather, which was expected to begin arriving Tuesday night, put a long stretch of states from New Mexico to Vermont under winter storm warnings and watches. More than a foot of snow was possible in Michigan, on the heels of a vicious nor'easter last weekend that brought blizzard conditions to many parts of the East Coast.</p> <p>"It will be a very messy system and will make travel very difficult," said Marty Rausch, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in College Park, Maryland.</p> <p>The projected footprint of the storm extended as far south as Texas, where nearly a year after a catastrophic freeze buckled the state's power grid in one of the worst blackouts in U.S. history, Gov. Greg Abbott defended the state's readiness. The forecast does not call for the same prolonged and frigid temperatures as the February 2021 storm and the National Weather Service said the approaching system would, generally, not be as bad this time for Texas.</p> <p>"No one can guarantee that there won't be any" outages caused by demand on the power grid, Abbott said Tuesday. "But what we will work to achieve, and what we're prepared to achieve is that power is going to stay on across the entire state."</p> <p>In November, Abbott had, in fact, made a guarantee for winter: "I can guarantee the lights will stay on," he told Austin television station KTBC.</p> <p>Abbott, whose handling of last year's blackouts is a top line of attack for Democrats as the Republican seeks a third term in 2022, said thousands of miles of roads in Texas will become "extraordinarily dangerous" over the coming days. Energy experts said the forecast this week, although below freezing, should not pose a challenge for Texas' grid.</p> <p>"The question has always been if we get a repeat of last year, would the power stay on? And this is nowhere near a repeat of last year," said Doug Lewin, an energy consultant in Austin who has criticized Texas' response to the blackouts as insufficient.</p> <p>Airlines canceled more than 1,000 flights in the U.S. scheduled for Wednesday, the flight-tracking service FlightAware.com showed, including more than half taken off the board in St. Louis. In an effort to stay ahead of the weather, Southwest Airlines announced Tuesday that it would suspend all of its flight operations Wednesday at St. Louis Lambert International Airport and Thursday at its Dallas Love Field hub.</p> <p>"Around the country, we're planning to operate a limited or reduced schedule from some cities in the path of the storm but will make adjustments to the schedule as needed," Southwest spokesman Dan Landson said.</p> <p>Missouri Gov. Mike Parson declared a state of emergency as school districts and universities shifted classes to online or canceled them entirely.</p>

Chicago O'Hare International Airport also canceled more than 100 departing flights, and airports in Kansas City and Detroit were also canceling more flights than usual.

Illinois lawmakers canceled their three scheduled days of session this week as the central part of the state prepares for heavy snow, ice and high wind gusts in the region.

The National Weather Service said 6 to 12 inches (15 to 30 centimeters) of snow was expected by Thursday morning in parts of the Rockies and Midwest, while heavy ice is likely from Texas through the Ohio Valley.

On Wednesday and Thursday, the weather service said 8 to 14 inches (20 to 36 centimeters) of snow was possible in parts of Michigan. That includes Detroit, where the mayor activated snow emergency routes and city crews were expected to work 12-hour shifts salting and plowing major roads.

In Oklahoma, Gov. Kevin Stitt has declared a statewide state of emergency as the winter storm approaches. That suspends requirements for size and weights permits of oversized vehicles transporting materials and supplies used for emergency relief and power restoration. The declaration would remain in effect for seven days.

In Tulsa, Oklahoma, where up to 7 inches (18 centimeters) of snow and sleet are forecast but little ice, emergency management director Joe Kralicek said the event is not expected to cause large-scale power outages based on an ice index used by the National Weather Service.

"We could see some power outages, however, it's also suggesting that they be limited in scope and nature and very short term in duration," Kralicek said.

Becky Gligo, director of the nonprofit Housing Solutions in Tulsa said teams are working to move homeless people into shelters ahead of overnight lows that are expected to drop into single digits by Friday night.

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Cyber Awareness

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HEADLINE	02/01 State licensing, renewal site outage
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/state-licensing-renewal-website-down-causing-delays-for-business-owners
GIST	<p>TACOMA, Wash. - It's been a bumpy road for small business owners as they try to stay afloat during the pandemic.</p> <p>Now, they are up against another challenge: licensing issues, as the state-run website is currently down.</p> <p>It's a website you probably have never used, but it's one of the most important ones in the state of Washington, as it makes sure the businesses you go to daily are in compliance with the state and have the proper documentation.</p> <p>Without licenses, your regular shops can be shut down.</p> <p>We spoke with Nikki Carson, a real estate agent who has been trying to apply for her broker license and start her own firm.</p> <p><i>"Our system is currently down. We are unable to process licenses or renewals at this time. We apologize for the inconvenience, please try again later."</i>—that's the message Carson sees as soon as she opens the Department of Licensing website.</p>

"It's already challenging enough, most businesses statistically don't last a year, and at this rate though, you're not even going to be able to get started," Carson said.

The 44-year-old real estate agent says she's patient.

She started her online coursework, 90 hours' worth, then submitted her certificates to the state to schedule her exam.

"And that's where I'm stuck," Carson said.

She says she submitted everything about a month ago, but her paperwork was under review for about three weeks.

"Then the website just went down about a week ago. It just said 'Page not found,' that was for, like, three days," Carson said.

This is where her headaches began.

"Now the website is back up, but it says they're not processing applications or renewals and there's no ETA on the resolution," Carson said as she scrolled through the DOL website.

But it's not just an issue for real estate agents nor new business owners.

Anyone trying to renew their license can't submit their application, including bail bonds, cosmetologists, employment agencies, home inspectors, nail technicians, notaries, security guards, tattoo artists, taxis and many others.

"Small business owners are really frustrated right now," Carson said.

It's an additional hurdle she says she was not counting on.

While she understands COVID continues to cause staffing issues, she says all she wants is some transparency.

"Be honest about what the situation, is that's all I'm asking, because if I had the information, then I could make the correct business decisions for my business," Carson said. "Am I putting this on hold for three months, six months, nine months, and then do what I need to do, financially, to make that work?" Carson went a step further and emailed [Governor Jay Inslee](#) about the ongoing issue and received an automated response.

"We all benefit from the input of interested individuals like you, although the volume of contacts we received does not permit a specific response to every email. Please know that all comments are read and shared with internal staff and agencies as appropriate," Carson says her email reads.

FOX 13 has reached out to the Department of Licensing, who says they're aware of the issue and are working on it.

We also reached out to Governor Inslee and are currently waiting to hear back.

Now, Carson says she's forced to have difficult conversations with her family and possibly relocating, if she can't open her business soon.

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HEADLINE	02/01 SolarMarker malware uses novel techniques
SOURCE	https://thehackernews.com/2022/02/solarmarker-malware-uses-novel.html

GIST	<p>In a sign that threat actors continuously shift tactics and update their defensive measures, the operators of the SolarMarker information stealer and backdoor have been found leveraging stealthy Windows Registry tricks to establish long-term persistence on compromised systems.</p> <p>Cybersecurity firm Sophos, which spotted the new behavior, said that the remote access implants are still being detected on targeted networks despite the campaign witnessing a decline in November 2021.</p> <p>Boasting of information harvesting and backdoor capabilities, the .NET-based malware has been linked to at least three different attack waves in 2021. The first set, reported in April, took advantage of search engine poisoning techniques to trick business professionals into visiting sketchy Google sites that installed SolarMarker on the victim's machines.</p> <p>Then in August, the malware was observed targeting healthcare and education sectors with the goal of gathering credentials and sensitive information. Subsequent infection chains documented by Morphisec in September 2021 highlighted the use of MSI installers to ensure the delivery of the malware.</p> <p>The SolarMarker modus operandi commences with redirecting victims to decoy sites that drop the MSI installer payloads, which, while executing seemingly legitimate install programs such as Adobe Acrobat Pro DC, Wondershare PDFelement, or Nitro Pro, also launches a PowerShell script to deploy the malware.</p> <p>"These SEO efforts, which leveraged a combination of Google Groups discussions and deceptive web pages and PDF documents hosted on compromised (usually WordPress) websites, were so effective that the SolarMarker lures were usually at or near the top of search results for phrases the SolarMarker actors targeted," Sophos researchers Gabor Szappanos and Sean Gallagher said in a report shared with The Hacker News.</p> <p>The PowerShell installer is designed to alter the Windows Registry and drop a .LNK file into Windows' startup directory to establish persistence. This unauthorized change results in the malware getting loaded from an encrypted payload hidden amongst what the researchers called a "smokescreen" of 100 to 300 junk files created specifically for this purpose.</p> <p>"Normally, one would expect this linked file to be an executable or script file," the researchers detailed. "But for these SolarMarker campaigns the linked file is one of the random junk files, and cannot be executed itself."</p> <p>What's more, the unique and random file extension used for the linked junk file is utilized to create a custom file type key, which is ultimately employed to execute the malware during system startup by running a PowerShell command from the Registry.</p> <p>The backdoor, for its part, is ever-evolving, featuring an array of functionalities that allow it to steal information from web browsers, facilitate cryptocurrency theft, and execute arbitrary commands and binaries, the results of which are exfiltrated back to a remote server.</p> <p>"Another important takeaway [...], which was also seen in the ProxyLogon vulnerabilities targeting Exchange servers, is that defenders should always check whether attackers have left something behind in the network that they can return to later," Gallagher said. "For ProxyLogon this was web shells, for SolarMarker this is a stealthy and persistent backdoor that according to Sophos telematics is still active months after the campaign ended."</p>
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HEADLINE	02/01 British Council students' data exposed
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/british-council-students-data/
GIST	Hundreds of thousands of British Council students had their personal and login details exposed in a worrying data breach, according to an investigation by Clario researchers.

The team discovered an open Microsoft Azure blob repository indexed by a public search engine that held 144K+ of xml, json and xls/xlsx files, with no authentication in place. These contained sensitive information about hundreds of thousands of students that had enrolled on British Council courses across the world. This included students' full names, email addresses, student IDs, notes, student status, enrollment dates and study duration. It is not known how long this information was available online in public.

The breach was discovered on December 5 2021, and Clario informed the British Council as soon as they had confirmed their findings. However, they received no response. After 48 hours, contact was made via Twitter, and Clario engaged in regular communication with the organization via direct messages on the platform.

Two weeks later, on December 21, the British Council issued the following statement: "The British Council takes its responsibilities under the Data Protection Act 2018 and General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) very seriously. The privacy and security of personal information is paramount.

"Upon becoming aware of this incident, where the data was held by a third-party supplier, the records in question were immediately secured, and we continue to look into the incident in order to ensure that all necessary measures are and remain in place.

"We have reported the incident to the appropriate regulatory authorities and will fully cooperate with any investigation or further actions required."

Clario stated: "Although they were not responsible for the data breach, errors made by the data provider they decided to work with have exposed these student details. This suggests that they need to be more rigorous in terms of how they select and work with third parties."

British Council students have been warned that the breach may put them at risk of various scams, such as phishing and identity theft.

The British Council is a non-departmental public organization that aims to connect people in the UK and other countries through culture, education and the English language. In 2019-20, it connected with 80 million people directly and 791 million overall, including online and through broadcasts and publications.

At the end of last year, official data obtained from a Freedom of Information request revealed that the [council had fallen victim to two successful ransomware attacks](#) over the past five years, suffering a total of 12 days of downtime as a result.

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HEADLINE	02/01 SSN most targeted sensitive data in breach
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/ssns-most-targeted-sensitive-data/
GIST	<p>Social Security Numbers (SSN) are the type of sensitive data most commonly targeted in data breaches in the United States, according to new research published today by Spirion.</p> <p>Analysis conducted against the Identity Theft Resource Center (ITRC) database of publicly reported data breaches in the United States revealed that 65% of all sensitive data incidents in 2021 involved SSN.</p> <p>The finding was included in the data protection and privacy company's <i>Definitive Guide to Sensitive Data Breaches: America's Top Leaks, Attacks and Insider Hacks</i>. Spirion's guide is based on the analysis of more than 1,500 data breaches involving sensitive data in the United States last year.</p> <p>A total of 1,862 data compromises were reported by US organizations last year, representing a 68% increase over 2020 and making 2021 steal 2017's title of the most prolific year on record for data breaches. ITRC data showed that 83% of the year's incidents impacted more than 150 million individuals by exposing 889 million sensitive data records.</p>

	<p>Personal Health Information (PHI) was the second most targeted form of sensitive data and was the focus of 41% of data incidents. The third most predated forms of sensitive data were bank account information and driver's licenses, which were each involved in 23% of incidents.</p> <p>The majority of individuals affected by sensitive data breaches in 2021 (84%) were victims of incidents in the professional and business services, telecommunications and healthcare industries. The 157 reported data breaches in the professional and business services sector impacted 52 million individuals (or 35% of total individuals). Just eight incidents in the telecommunications industry impacted 47.8 million individuals (or 32% of total individuals).</p> <p>Trends identified in the guide included the emergence of supply chain and third-party attacks as a leading contributor to sensitive data compromises.</p> <p>"A total of 93 third-party attacks impacted 559 organizations, exposing more than 1.1 billion data records," said a Spirion spokesperson.</p> <p>"Of these incidents, 83% contained sensitive data, revealing PII [personally identifiable information] for 7.2 million people."</p> <p>Another trend was experiencing multiple data breaches in one year – a fate suffered by more than two dozen US organizations in 2021.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/02 Scottish agency still recovering 2020 attack
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/scottish-agency-2020-ransomware/
GIST	<p>A ransomware attack on a Scottish regulator in 2020 continues to significantly impact operations, with the true cost of the incident still unknown, an audit has found.</p> <p>The double extortion attack hit the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) on Christmas Eve 2020, forcing IT services offline.</p> <p>According to a new report from Audit Scotland, the initial attack vector appears to have been a phishing email, although it's still not 100% clear.</p> <p>Despite following best practice backup guidelines, with one copy stored offline, the "sophisticated nature of the attack" meant online copies were quickly targeted, and there was no way of accessing historical records quickly, the spending watchdog claimed.</p> <p>As a result, the "majority" of SEPA's data was encrypted, stolen or lost.</p> <p>Despite claiming the agency had a "high" level of cyber-maturity, independent reviews since the attack have also made 44 recommendations for enhancing the agency's cyber-readiness and resilience.</p> <p>According to Audit Scotland, it will be particularly alarming to Scottish taxpayers that more than a year on from the attack, the agency is still reinstating some of its systems.</p> <p>The auditor took the rare step of issuing a "disclaimer of opinion" on SEPA's annual accounts for 2020/21, claiming it couldn't access enough evidence to substantiate £42m of income from contracts.</p> <p>The agency still doesn't know the total financial impact of the cyber-attack, although it has already been forced to write off over £2m in bad debts because of records lost to the incident.</p> <p>"Based on management forecasts during the year, the Scottish Government gave SEPA authority to overspend by £2.5m to cover the impact of Covid19 and the cyber-attack if required," the report claimed.</p>

	“SEPA recognizes that the cyber-attack has increased the medium to longer-term financial pressures on the organization. Its financial strategy 2020-24 had already identified potential variability in future income and expenditure streams of up to £17.9m as a worst-case scenario.”
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HEADLINE	02/01 FBI warns of fake job postings
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/fbi-warns-of-fake-job-postings-used-to-steal-money-personal-info/
GIST	<p>Scammers are trying to steal job seekers' money and personal information through phishing campaigns using fake advertisements posted on recruitment platforms.</p> <p>The warning was published today as a public service announcement (PSA) on the Bureau's Internet Crime Complaint Center (IC3).</p> <p>"The FBI warns that malicious actors or 'scammers' continue to exploit security weaknesses on job recruitment websites to post fraudulent job postings in order to trick applicants into providing personal information or money," the FBI says.</p> <p>"These scammers lend credibility to their scheme by using legitimate information to imitate businesses, threatening reputational harm for the business and financial loss for the job seeker."</p> <p>Such scams have been around since early 2019, with average reported losses of almost \$3,000 per victim besides the damage inflicted on victims' credit scores.</p> <p>The federal law enforcement agency issued a similar warning in January 2020, saying that cybercriminals also began spoofing legitimate companies' sites to steal job applicants' money and personally identifiable information (PII).</p> <p>Crooks are taking advantage of the lack of strong security verification standards on recruitment websites to post fake job openings indistinguishable from those published by the companies they're impersonating. As BleepingComputer reported last year, anyone could have created job listings on behalf of almost any company on the LinkedIn recruitment platform without any verification.</p> <p>"Fraudulent job listings include links and contact information that direct applicants to spoofed websites, email addresses, and phone numbers controlled by the scammers where the applicant's personal information can be stolen and then sold or used in additional scams," the FBI explained.</p> <p>"The COVID-19 pandemic has drastically changed interview and hiring processes making it imperative that businesses and job applicants verify the legitimacy of postings and employment opportunities," the FBI added.</p> <p>"The FBI urges the American public to use caution when applying for and accepting positions through an entirely remote process that has limited or no in-person meetings, contact, and onboarding."</p> <p>If you fall victim to such a scam, you should report it to IC3 at www.ic3.gov or to your local FBI field office (you can find a list at www.fbi.gov/contact-us/field-offices).</p>
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HEADLINE	02/01 Moses Staff group 'StrifeWater' malware
SOURCE	https://thehackernews.com/2022/02/hacker-group-moses-staff-using-new.html?&web_view=true
GIST	A politically motivated hacker group tied to a series of espionage and sabotage attacks on Israeli entities in 2021 incorporated a previously undocumented remote access trojan (RAT) that masquerades as the Windows Calculator app as part of a conscious effort to stay under the radar.

Cybersecurity company Cybereason, which has been tracking the operations of the Iranian actor known as Moses Staff, dubbed the malware "StrifeWater."

"The StrifeWater RAT appears to be used in the initial stage of the attack and this stealthy RAT has the ability to remove itself from the system to cover the Iranian group's tracks," Tom Fakterman, Cybereason security analyst, [said](#) in a report. "The RAT possesses other capabilities, such as command execution and screen capturing, as well as the ability to download additional extensions."

Moses Staff came to light towards the end of last year when Check Point Research unmasked a series of attacks aimed at Israeli organizations since September 2021 with the objective of disrupting the target's business operations by encrypting their networks, with no option to regain access or negotiate a ransom.

The intrusions were notable for the fact that they relied on the open-source library DiskCryptor to perform volume encryption, in addition to infecting the systems with a bootloader that prevents them from starting without the correct encryption key.

Ransomware Attacks

To date, victims have been reported beyond Israel, including Italy, India, Germany, Chile, Turkey, the U.A.E., and the U.S.

The new piece of the attack puzzle discovered by Cybereason comes in the form of a RAT that's deployed under the name "calc.exe" (the Windows Calculator binary) and is used during the early stages of the infection chain, only to be removed prior to the deployment of the file-encrypting malware.

The removal and the subsequent replacement of the malicious calculator executable with the legitimate binary, the researchers suspect, is an attempt on the part of the threat actor to cover up tracks and erase evidence of the trojan, not to mention enable them to evade detection until the final phase of the attack when the ransomware payload is executed.

StrifeWater, for its part, is no different from its counterparts and comes with numerous features, chief among them being the ability to list system files, execute system commands, take screen captures, create persistence, and download updates and auxiliary modules.

"The end goal for Moses Staff appears to be more politically motivated rather than financial," Fakterman concluded. "Moses Staff employs ransomware post-exfiltration not for financial gain, but to disrupt operations, obfuscate espionage activity, and to inflict damage to systems to advance Iran's geopolitical goals."

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HEADLINE	02/01 Ransomware plagues public services
SOURCE	https://www.techtarget.com/searchsecurity/news/252512797/Ransomware-attacks-continue-to-plague-public-services?&web_view=true
GIST	<p>Crawford County, Ark., was like dozens of other local governments in 2021, a victim of a ransomware attack that halted operations and frustrated residents and IT workers alike. While it is on the smaller side as far as counties go, Crawford does get to hold the distinction of being one of the last reported ransomware attacks of the year, being struck on Dec. 26, 2021.</p> <p>While a new year has dawned, Crawford County still has not gotten all its systems back online, according to County Judge Dennis Gilstrap, who said the county is working with Apprentice Information Systems to restore its operations.</p> <p>Initially it seemed the county would be fully operational in just a couple of weeks, after a report on Jan. 4 said both the assessor and tax collector offices were back up. On Jan. 27, however, Gilstrap told</p>

SearchSecurity, "We are still in the process of recovery" and did not give a timetable on the full return of systems.

Even with the start of 2022, ransomware attackers haven't let up on government offices and public services within the U.S., which has been a [familiar trend](#) for some time. Since Jan. 1, there have been at least 10 reported public entities attacked by ransomware across the U.S., including schools, hospitals and county offices.

These are just the publicly reported figures so far; there are certain to be other incidents that have yet to be disclosed or reported. Emsisoft's recent [annual report](#) found that in 2021, ransomware attacks affected "a total of 2,323 local governments, schools and healthcare providers." The [2020 Emsisoft report](#) saw similarly high ransomware attacks targeted at public agencies in the U.S., with "at least 2,354 U.S. governments, healthcare facilities and schools" affected by ransomware.

Some of the worst victims of attacks reported so far this year have been county governments, which have not announced the financial damages, but have suffered massive disruption and downtime to valuable public services.

Allan Liska, ransomware researcher at Recorded Future, described one of the main issues facing local governments trying to stop ransomware attacks.

"Local governments are very aware of the problem, but they don't have the ability to increase their budgets significantly," Liska told SearchSecurity. "It is not just a matter of buying technology; the federal government could say, here, every town and city gets \$200,000 to buy whatever, whether it's better endpoint protection, better firewalls, better SIEM or whatever kind of tool it is. You will also need the personnel to manage that software, and that is really where the problem is."

So far this year, [Bernalillo County](#), N.M., has been the symbol of just how badly ransomware attacks can affect local governments. Bernalillo, which is New Mexico's largest county and includes the city of Albuquerque, was attacked in early January and is still attempting to recover from the incident that knocked most of the county systems offline, including operations in Alvarado Square and the county detention center.

Other counties that have been hit include Dawson County, Neb., and Linn County, Ore.

Dawson County [released its notice](#) of a data breach on Jan. 14, informing residents whose information may have been compromised in the attack. According to the notice, no county systems were taken offline, but cybercriminals had stolen personal information and demanded a ransom in exchange. When Dawson County refused to pay the ransom, attackers released the personal information onto the [dark web](#), exposing residents' health information and other personal data.

Linn County, like Bernalillo, suffered [a systems failure](#) as a result of a ransomware attack first identified on Jan. 24. The county is still without its main website, but the clerk's office is up and running again.

The city of Albany, Ore., shares a computer network with Linn County. There was apparently no major impact to the Albany websites, but due to a precautionary disconnection between the networks, Albany police are now filing records by hand because they lost connection to the district attorney's office.

Ransomware attacks have affected more than just county governments. For example, the city of Pembroke Pines, Fla., was [hit by a ransomware attack](#) on Jan. 13.

The city has not published a report on what specific systems were affected or if any residents may have been affected by the attack. City officials provided statements to several media outlets confirming the attack, which disrupted some computer services, but they said police and fire services were unaffected.

Government offices have not been the only public bodies attacked, as three different school districts have reported being targeted by ransomware since the beginning of January. One incident affected residents who were already quite aware of the damage ransomware can cause.

A ransomware attack hit Albuquerque Public Schools on Jan. 12, which caused the schools to close for the rest of that week, reopening on Jan. 18. The incident disrupted access to the student information system that teachers use, but the district said it had found a way [to operate schools without those services](#) for the time being.

Other schools affected included the Griggsville-Perry School District in Pike County, Ill. The school district announced on its Facebook page on Jan. 10, "GP Schools are experiencing network issues today. If you try to contact the offices or staff, please know that your message may not get to us in a timely manner. We will keep you updated as we get more information."

Over the next couple of weeks, Griggsville-Perry continued to provide updates on the recovery process. On Jan. 17, after a week of trying to resolve the issues, the school district announced that school would be closed Jan. 18 and 19. On the 19th, the school district announced the extent of the ransomware attack.

"Our techs have been working through the weekend and on these last few days to make sure our systems are 'clean' and ready to use," the Griggsville-Perry School District posted on its Facebook page. "They have assured [us] they are. However, many files that teachers use are gone at this point. Some will be retrievable. Some will not be. That will make it difficult for teachers to plan and deliver instruction.

"In addition, we will have network problems as we go along that will need addressed. That will all take time. Therefore, GP Schools will dismiss early on Thursday and Friday to give staff time to take inventory, create new materials and make new plans."

On Jan. 21, another announcement stated that there would be early dismissals each day for the upcoming week. The school district continues to try to recover from this incident -- so far this year, it has been the school district most affected by a ransomware attack.

Schools and governments are not the only public services being affected by ransomware attacks. Health systems are also not immune, as the [Maryland Department of Health announced](#) last month. On Jan. 12, the state's CISO Chip Stewart said that what was initially thought to be a simple server outage was a ransomware attack aimed at the department's COVID-19 data systems.

While the systems for reporting COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations are now back online, the state was unable to provide update statistics on COVID-19 to its residents for a few weeks while working to remove the ransomware.

When it comes to health services, a hospital in Marianna, Fla., was far happier last month than the Maryland Department of Health, when one of its IT workers [discovered an attempted breach](#) and quickly snuffed it out. While it did result in some systems having to be shut off out of precaution, the IT department's quick thinking on Jan. 9 reportedly mitigated the attack and prevented extensive damage.

While some of these incidents were prevented from causing any real damage, ransomware has still affected thousands of victims in the U.S. in just the first month of 2022. These are also just some of the public stories so far of ransomware attacks against public services. There are sure to be many more announced in the coming months as ransomware threat actors are just starting to get things underway in 2022.

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HEADLINE	0201 Powerful new Oski variant 'Mars Stealer'
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/powerful-new-oski-variant-mars-stealer-grabbing-2fas-and-crypto/?&web_view=true

A new and powerful malware named 'Mars Stealer' has appeared in the wild, and appears to be a redesign of the [Oski](#) malware that shut down development abruptly in the summer of 2020.

Mars Stealer is an information-stealing malware that steals data from all popular web browsers, two-factor authentication plugins, and multiple cryptocurrency extensions and wallets.

Additionally, the malware can exfiltrate files from the infected system and relies on its own loader and wiper, which minimizes the infection footprint.

From Oski to Mars Stealer

In July 2020, the developers behind the Oski information-stealing trojan suddenly shut down their operation after no longer responding to buyers and the closing of their Telegram channel.

Fast forward almost a year later, and a new information-stealing malware called 'Mars Stealer' began to be promoted on Russian-speaking hacking forums.

After security researcher [@3xp0rt](#) obtained a sample, the [researcher discovered](#) that the Mars Stealer is a redesigned version of Oski malware with enhanced functionality.

Stealing everything

Mars Stealer uses a custom grabber that retrieves its configuration from the C2 and then proceeds to target the following applications:

Internet apps: Google Chrome, Internet Explorer, Microsoft Edge (Chromium Version), Kometa, Amigo, Torch, Orbitium, Comodo Dragon, Nichrome, Maxxthon5, Maxxthon6, Sputnik Browser, Epic Privacy Browser, Vivaldi, CocCoc, Uran Browser, QIP Surf, Cent Browser, Elements Browser, TorBro Browser, CryptoTab Browser, Brave, Opera Stable, Opera GX, Opera Neon, Firefox, SlimBrowser, PaleMoon, Waterfox, CyberFox, BlackHawk, IceCat, K-Meleon, Thunderbird.

2FA apps: Authenticator, Authy, EOS Authenticator, GAuth Authenticator, Trezor Password Manager.

Crypto extensions: TronLink, MetaMask, Binance Chain Wallet, Yoroi, Nifty Wallet, Math Wallet, Coinbase Wallet, Guarda, EQUAL Wallet, Jaox Liberty, BitAppWllet, iWallet, Wombat, MEW CX, Guild Wallet, Saturn Wallet, Ronin Wallet, Neoline, Clover Wallet, Liquidity Wallet, Terra Station, Keplr, Sollet, Auro Wallet, Polymesh Wallet, ICONex, Nabox Wallet, KHC, Temple, TezBox Cyano Wallet, Byone, OneKey, Leaf Wallet, DAppPlay, BitClip, Steem Keychain, Nash Extension, Hycon Lite Client, ZilPay, Coin98 Wallet.

Crypto wallets: Bitcoin Core and all derivatives (Dogecoin, Zcash, DashCore, Litecoin, etc), Ethereum, Electrum, Electrum LTC, Exodus, Electron Cash, MultiDoge, JAXX, Atomic, Binance, Coinomi.

Moreover, Mars Stealer will capture and send the following basic information to the C2:

- IP and country
- Working path to EXE file
- Local time and time zone
- Language system
- Language keyboard layout
- Notebook or desktop
- Processor model
- Computer name
- User name
- Domain computer name
- Machine ID
- GUID
- Installed software and their versions

The only notable omission from the targeted application list is Outlook, which the malware authors will likely add in future releases.

Evading detection

Mars Stealer is a lean malware of just 95 KB in size, which attempts to evade security by using routines that hide API calls and string-encryption techniques using a combination of RC4 and Base64.

The information it collects is wrapped in memory, while all connections with the C2 are done with the SSL (Secure Sockets Layer) protocol, so they're encrypted.

Moreover, the Mars Stealer code contains Sleep function intervals to perform timing checks that would result in a mismatch if a debugger is used.

Finally, the malware can remove itself after the user data has been exfiltrated or when the operator decides to wipe it.

Functional checks

Mars Stealer also checks if a user is based in countries historically part of the [Commonwealth of Independent States](#), which is common for many Russian-based malware.

If the device's language ID matches Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan, the program will exit without performing any malicious behavior.

Moreover, the malware has to have a compilation date no older than a month than the system time; otherwise, it exits the execution process.

Currently, Mars Stealer is sold for \$140 to \$160 (extended version) on hacking forums, so it will likely get in the hands of numerous threat actors and be used in attacks in the future.

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HEADLINE	02/01 Malicious CSV text files install malware
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/malicious-csv-text-files-used-to-install-bazarbackdoor-malware/?&web_view=true
GIST	<p>A new phishing campaign is using specially crafted CSV text files to infect users' devices with the BazarBackdoor malware.</p> <p>A comma-separated values (CSV) file is a text file containing lines of text with columns of data separated by commas. In many cases, the first line of text is the header, or description, for each column.</p> <p>For example, a very basic CSV text file containing the capitals of some US states is illustrated below. Notice how commas separate each column of data (states and capitals).</p> <p>State,Capital Alabama,Montgomery Alaska,Juneau Arizona,Phoenix Arkansas,Little Rock California,Sacramento Colorado,Denver Connecticut,Hartford Delaware,Dover Florida,Tallahassee</p> <p>As you can see above, the file contains nothing but text, but when loaded into Excel, the data is presented with each line on its own row and the data separated by the commas into columns of data.</p>

Using CSVs is a popular method to export data from applications that can then be imported into other programs as a data source, whether that be Excel, a database, password managers, or billing software.

Since a CSV is simply text with no executable code, many people consider these types of files harmless and may be more carefree when opening them.

However, Microsoft Excel supports a feature called Dynamic Data Exchange (DDE), which can be used to execute commands whose output is inputted into the open spreadsheet, including CSV files.

Unfortunately, threat actors can also abuse this feature to execute commands that download and install malware on unsuspecting victims.

CSV file uses DDE to install BazarBackdoor

A [new phishing campaign](#) spotted by security researcher [Chris Campbell](#) is installing the BazarLoader/BazarBackdoor trojan through malicious CSV files.

BazarBackdoor is a [stealthy backdoor malware created by the TrickBot group](#) to provide threat actors remote access to an internal device that can be used as a springboard for further lateral movement within a network.

The phishing emails pretend to be "Payment Remittance Advice" with links to remote sites that download a CSV file with names similar to 'document-21966.csv.'

The astute reader, though, will notice that one of the data columns contains a strange WMIC call in one of the columns of data that launches a PowerShell command.

This =WmiC| command is a DDE function that causes Microsoft Excel, if given permission, to launch [WMIC.exe](#) and execute the provided PowerShell command to input data into the open workbook.

In this particular case, the DDE will use WMIC to create a new PowerShell process that opens a remote URL containing another PowerShell command that is then executed.

The remote PowerShell script command, shown below, will download a picture.jpg file and save it as C:\Users\Public\87764675478.dll. This DLL program is then executed using the rundll32.exe command.

The DLL file [[Tria.ge sample](#)] will install BazarLoader, ultimately deploying the BazarBackdoor and other payloads on the device.

Thankfully, when this CSV file is opened in Excel, the program will spot the DDE call and prompt the user to "enable automatic update of links," which is marked as a security concern.

Even if they enable the feature, Excel will show them another prompt confirming if WMIC should be allowed to start to access the remote data.

If the user confirms both prompts, Microsoft Excel will launch the PowerShell scripts, the DLL will be downloaded and executed, and BazarBackdoor will be installed on the device.

While this threat does require users to confirm that the DDE function should be allowed to execute, [AdvIntel](#) CEO [Vitali Kremez](#) told BleepingComputer that people are falling for the ongoing phishing attack.

"Based on our visibility into the BazarBackdoor telemetry, we have observed 102 actual non-sandbox corporate and government victims over the past two days from this phishing campaign," Kremez explained in an online discussion.

	<p>Once BazarBackdoor is installed, it will allow the threat actors access to the corporate network, which the attacks will use to spread laterally throughout the network.</p> <p>Ultimately, this could lead to further malware infections, the stealing of data, and the deployment of ransomware.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/01 Trickbot: Russia ransomware gang
SOURCE	https://www.wired.com/story/trickbot-malware-group-internal-messages/
GIST	<p>WHEN THE PHONES and computer networks went down at Ridgeview Medical Center’s three hospitals on October 24, 2020, the medical group resorted to a Facebook post to warn its patients about the disruption. One local volunteer-run fire department said ambulances were being diverted to other hospitals; officials reported patients and staff were safe. The downtime at the Minnesota medical facilities was no technical glitch; reports quickly linked the activity to one of Russia’s most notorious ransomware gangs.</p> <p>Thousands of miles away, just two days later members of the Trickbot cybercrime group privately gloated over what easy targets hospitals and health care providers make. “You see, how fast, hospitals and centers reply,” Target, a key member of the Russia-linked malware gang, boasted in messages to one of their colleagues. The exchange is included in previously unreported documents, seen by WIRED, that consist of hundreds of messages sent between Trickbot members and detail the inner workings of the notorious hacking group. “Answers from the rest, [take] days. And from the ridge immediately the answer flew in,” Target wrote.</p> <p>As Target typed, members of Trickbot were in the middle of launching a huge wave of ransomware attacks against hospitals across the United States. Their aim: to force hospitals busy responding to the surging Covid-19 pandemic to quickly pay ransoms. The series of attacks prompted urgent warnings from federal agencies, including the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency and the Federal Bureau of Investigation. “Fuck clinics in the usa this week,” Target said as they gave the instruction to start targeting a list of 428 hospitals. “There’s gonna be a panic.”</p> <p>The documents seen by WIRED include messages between senior members of Trickbot, dated from the summer and autumn of 2020, and expose how the group planned to expand its hacking operations. They lay bare key members’ aliases and show the ruthless attitude of members of the criminal gang.</p> <p>The messages were sent in the months before and shortly after US Cyber Command disrupted much of Trickbot’s infrastructure and temporarily stopped the group’s work. Since then the group has scaled up its operations and evolved its malware, and it continues to target businesses around the world. While Russia’s Federal Security Service has recently arrested members of the REvil ransomware gang—following diplomatic efforts between presidents Joe Biden and Vladimir Putin—Trickbot’s inner circle has so far been left relatively unscathed.</p> <p>The Trickbot group evolved from the banking trojan Dyre around the end of 2015, when Dyre’s members were arrested. The gang has grown its original banking trojan to become an all-purpose hacking toolkit; individual modules, which operate like plugins, allow its operators to deploy Ryuk and Conti ransomware, while other functions enable keylogging and data collection. “I don’t know any other malware families that have so many modules or extended functionalities,” says Vlad Pasca, a senior malware analyst at security company Lifars who has decompiled Trickbot’s code. That sophistication has helped the gang, also known as Wizard Spider, collect millions of dollars from victims.</p> <p>A core team of around half a dozen criminals sits at the heart of Trickbot’s operations, according to the documents reviewed by WIRED and security experts who track the group. Each member has their own specialities, such as managing teams of coders or heading up ransomware deployments. At the head of the organization is Stern. (Like all the monikers used in this story, the real-world name, or names, behind the handles are unknown. They are, however, the identities the group uses when talking to each other.)</p>

“He is the boss of Trickbot,” says Alex Holden, who is CEO of cybersecurity firm Hold Security and has knowledge of the workings of the gang. Stern acts like a CEO of the Trickbot group and communicates with other members who are at a similar level. They may also report to others who are unknown, Holden says. “Stern does not get into the technical side as much,” he says. “He wants reports. He wants more communication. He wants to make high-level decisions.”

On August 20, 2020, the chat logs—provided by a cybersecurity source with knowledge of the group—show Target briefing Stern on how the group would expand in the coming weeks. “There will be 6 offices for sure and 50-80 people by the end of September,” Target said in one of a flurry of 19 messages. These offices are believed to be based in Russia’s second-largest city, Saint Petersburg. Kimberly Goody, director of cybercrime analysis at security firm Mandiant, says the group “most likely” has a significant presence there. Current estimates say Trickbot has anywhere from 100 to 400 members, making it one of the largest cybercrime groups in existence.

Messages between Target and Stern show that in mid-2020 the group was spending money on three main areas. Two offices—“one main and one new for training”—were being used for the current operators’ expenses and expansion. “Hacker offices,” where 20-plus people worked, would be used for interviews, equipment, servers, and hiring, Target said. And finally, there would be an office for “programmers” and their equipment. “A good team leader has already been hired, and he will help gather the team,” Target continued. “I’m sure that everything will pay off, so I’m not nervous.”

Throughout the conversations viewed by WIRED, the group makes various references to “senior managers” working as part of Trickbot and its businesslike structure. “There is generally a core team of developers,” Goody explains. “There’s a manager who oversees development work, and they have coders that work under them on specific projects.” Members of the group are encouraged to propose ideas, such as new scripts or malware, that developers could work on, Goody says, and generally the lower-level workers don’t talk to their senior colleagues. Most of the group’s internal conversations, according to various sources—including US court documents—happen through instant messages on Jabber servers.

A gang member going by the moniker Professor oversees much of the ransomware deployment work, Goody says. “Professor, who we believe also goes by the name Alter, seems to be a relatively significant player in terms of managing these specific ransomware deployment operations,” Goody says, “as well as requesting development of specific tools that would help enable those.” She adds that Professor has been linked to Conti ransomware operations in the last year and “appears to lead multiple sub-teams or has multiple team leaders” that report to them.

That wouldn’t be the only working relationship Trickbot’s team has with outside parties. In the conversations seen by WIRED, Target says the group will “learn to collaborate” with those behind the Ryuk ransomware, indicating that the two organizations are largely separate. And while the Trickbot group hasn’t been linked to hacking operations run by the Russian state—such as the activities of [Sandworm](#)—the core members of the gang make reference to Kremlin-backed activities. Stern mentioned setting up an office “for government topics” in July 2020. In response, Professor said the hacking group [Cozy Bear](#) is “working their way down the list” of potential Covid-19 targets.

In one set of internal conversations, Target answers questions from a group member who is concerned about being caught. The person is worried that colleagues could expose their locations, through leaking their IP addresses, when they don’t use a VPN to mask their whereabouts. Target says IP address exposure shouldn’t be a problem: “Here it is guaranteed that no one will touch you and you are probably not going to fly somewhere anyway.”

Prior to the REvil arrests, the Kremlin and Russian authorities spent years allowing ransomware groups believed to be based in the country to operate with relative impunity. “There seems to be very deliberate separation and non-attacks of any Russian interests by Trickbot, Ryuk, Emotet, and Conti because they don’t want confrontation with the government,” Holden says. However, not all of Trickbot’s members are in Russia. The conversations among the group viewed by WIRED reveal at least two members appear to

be based in Belarus—during the summer of 2020 [when Belarus shut down the internet](#) Stern said that one member, a coder called Hof, would not be online until “the internet problem in Belarus is solved.”

These exchanges likely comprise only a small element of the group’s interactions. Some details of TrickBot’s inner workings were also revealed in June and October 2021, when the US Department of Justice unsealed and unredacted charges against [two alleged Trickbot members, Alla Witte and Vladimir Dunaev](#). The indictment, which also covers other unnamed members of the Trickbot group, focuses on the group’s hacking and money laundering but also provides snippets of conversations. Goody says some private communication channels can contain dozens of members of the group.

Coders and developers recruited by Trickbot are drawn in from job postings on dark web forums but also on open web Russian-language freelancer websites, the DOJ indictment says. While many of the job ads are hiding in plain sight, they don’t explicitly say successful applicants will be working for one of the world’s most ruthless cybercriminal groups. One job ad the indictment points to calls for someone who is an experienced reverse engineer and knows the coding language C++. The ad, which has long-since expired, says the job was focused around web browsers on Windows, involved working remotely, and had a budget of \$7,000. A long-term position would potentially be possible if the work was completed successfully, the ad says.

Holden says Trickbot uses multiple layers during its hiring process in an effort to weed out those without the technical skills needed, and also cybersecurity companies trying to gather intelligence. Anyone applying for work has to pass an initial screening before moving on to tough skills tests, he says. “The questions are very complex technologically,” he explains. Goody adds that penetration testers working for the group can be paid \$1,500 per month, plus a cut of ransoms that are paid.

During the recruitment process, Holden says, it is “acknowledged” that these aren’t everyday roles. Holden says he has seen ads that tell potential recruits they will be working for a startup involved in bug bounties, and that most of its funding comes from abroad. “The majority understand that this is blackhat and asking for the commercial target,” Trickbot conversations within the DOJ indictment say, referring to criminal hacking activities. “We need to stop communicating with idiots.”

The two alleged members of Trickbot named by the DOJ—Witte and Dunaev—were arrested by law enforcement outside of Russia. Witte, a 55-year-old Latvian national who lived in Suriname, was arrested in June 2021 while traveling to Miami and is charged with 19 counts that range from identity theft to bank fraud. She’s [accused](#) of being one of Trickbot’s malware developers and allegedly exposed herself after hosting Trickbot’s malware on her personal domain name. Dunaev, 38, was extradited from the Republic of Korea to Ohio in October 2021 and is also [accused](#) of developing Trickbot’s malware.

Despite the arrests and wider ransomware crackdowns in Russia, the Trickbot group has not exactly gone into hiding. Toward the end of last year, the group [boosted its operations](#), says Limor Kessem, an executive security advisor at IBM Security. “They’re trying to infect as many people as possible by contracting out the infection,” she says. Since the start of 2022, the IBM security team has seen Trickbot increase its efforts to evade security protections and [conceal its activity](#). The FBI also formally linked the use of the Diavol ransomware to Trickbot at the beginning of the year. “Trickbot doesn’t seem to be targeting very specifically; I think what they have is numerous affiliates working with them, and whoever brings the most money is welcome to stay,” Limor says.

Holden too says he has seen evidence that Trickbot is ramping up its operations. “Last year they invested more than \$20 million into their infrastructure and growth of their organization,” he explains, citing internal messages he has seen. This money, he says, is being spent on everything Trickbot does. “Staffing, technology, communications, development, extortion” are all getting extra investment, he says. The move points to a future where—after the takedown of REvil—the Trickbot group may become the primary Russia-linked cybercrime gang. “You expand in the hope of getting that money back in spades,” Holden says. “It’s not like they are planning to close the shop. It’s not like they are planning to downsize or run and hide.”

HEADLINE	02/01 IG: NSA analysts failed to follow procedures
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/feb/1/nsa-watchdog-worries-analysts-searches-may-harm-am/
GIST	<p>National Security Agency analysts failed to follow court-approved procedures and internal policies for examining Americans' data when conducting searches under the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act, according to an NSA inspector general report.</p> <p>The semiannual report to Congress, published Monday, says an evaluation of NSA analysts' searches of communications aimed at foreigners did not always follow the rules and Americans' privacy may suffer as a result.</p> <p>"The evaluation revealed several issues that, if not addressed, have the potential to impact the effectiveness of the Agency's internal controls used to protect the civil liberties and privacy rights of [U.S. persons]," reads the NSA inspector general report.</p> <p>The analysts' searches were conducted under the authority of Section 702 of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act, which prevents the government from targeting U.S. persons (USPs).</p> <p>A search of communications such as the text of emails and content of conversations is allowed to gather Americans' information if the search is likely to return foreign intelligence information, according to the NSA.</p> <p>"While NSA has implemented both preventative and detective controls, the Agency has not completed the development of a preventative system control that performs pre-query validation to notify analysts of potential noncompliance with NSA query procedures or policy problems prior to query execution," the report says.</p> <p>An NSA spokesman said the agency is committed to following the Office of the Inspector General's oversight and work.</p> <p>"NSA continues to employ measures to assist analysts in conducting their work compliantly with civil liberties and privacy protections," an NSA spokesman said. "As the OIG included in its report, the Agency has in place multiple processes to aid in ensuring query compliance."</p> <p>The NSA's practice of gathering communications has become a political flash point that could put the spy agency in the public spotlight ahead of the November midterm elections.</p> <p>Last year, Fox News personality Tucker Carlson accused the NSA of monitoring his communications and preparing to use them against him, which the agency denied in a statement published to Twitter.</p> <p>The spat with the cable new host irked Republicans, and House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy plans to probe the NSA over its dispute with Mr. Carlson if the GOP retakes control of Congress, according to Axios.</p> <p>The inspector general's evaluation of analysts' searches could factor prominently into any congressional probe. Alongside a potential congressional investigation, NSA Inspector General Robert Storch is examining the kerfuffle involving Mr. Carlson, according to CBS News.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/01 FBI: cyberattacks during Beijing Olympics
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/feb/1/fbi-warns-cyberattacks-during-beijing-olympics/
GIST	State-backed hackers or private criminals may conduct cyberattacks targeting the Beijing Olympic games, the FBI said in a warning to computer network operators on Tuesday.

The warning followed a major speech on Monday by FBI Director Christopher Wray accusing China's government of conducting a "massive, sophisticated" ongoing campaign of cyberattacks aimed at stealing American technology and data.

"The FBI is warning entities associated with the February 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics and March 2022 Paralympics that cyber actors could use a broad range of cyber activities to disrupt these events," the bureau stated in a warning notice. "These activities include distributed denial of service (DDoS) attacks, ransomware, malware, social engineering, data theft or leaks, phishing campaigns, disinformation campaigns or insider threats, and when successful, can block or disrupt the live broadcast of the event, steal or leak sensitive data, or impact public or private digital infrastructure supporting the Olympics."

Athletes taking part in the Games or travelers to China for the sporting competition also face the danger of electronic infiltration of their mobile devices.

Chinese officials are requiring all Olympic participants to download smartphone applications that will allow the government to monitor their activities, citing the need to identify and contain COVID-19 outbreaks inside the "bubble" where events are being held.

The applications "could increase the opportunity for cyber actors to steal personal information or install tracking tools, malicious code, or malware," the notice said.

The FBI earlier said the use of Chinese government-mandated tax software by businesses operating in China had increased the danger that Beijing hackers will install malware on computer networks.

Use of digital "wallets" or applications that track COVID testing or vaccination status could be hacked to steal personal information or install malware. Athletes are required to install the Chinese government's MY2022 app to track health and travel data.

The FBI urged all athletes at the games to keep personal cell phones at home and use temporary devices while in China.

No specific cyber threats currently have been detected targeting the Olympics, the notice stated, urging those taking part to remain vigilant of cyberattacks and employ strong security practices.

China's government has already accused the Biden administration of conducting a covert operation to sabotage the Games by paying athletes to protest and otherwise disrupt the two-week global gathering. The State Department on Sunday denied the claims, although President Biden has said no U.S. officials will attend the game as part of a "diplomatic boycott."

China has restricted foreign visitors to the Olympics because of concerns about the outbreaks of the COVID virus, prompting would-be spectators to rely on streaming services and social media to watch events.

"Adversaries could use social engineering and phishing campaigns leading up to and during the event to implant malware to disrupt networks broadcasting the event," the FBI said.

Hotels, mass transit, ticketing services, event security infrastructure and other support functions also could be targeted by cyberattacks, the bureau notice said.

The FBI noted that during the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, the NTT Corp. that provided services during the games was hit by more than 450 million attempted cyber incidents. None were successful due to strong cyber security measures.

In 2018 during the Winter Olympics in South Korea, Russian hackers carried out a destructive cyberattack against the opening ceremony that was enabled through the use of "spear phishing" — the use of fraudulent emails — and through malicious mobile apps.

	The FBI urged all service providers to prepare for disruptions by preparing contingency plans to continue operations during cyberattacks.
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HEADLINE	02/01 German petrol supply firm suffers attack
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/german-petrol-supply-firm-oiltanking-paralyzed-by-cyber-attack/
GIST	<p>Oiltanking GmbH, a German petrol distributor who supplies Shell gas stations in the country, has fallen victim to a cyberattack that severely impacted its operations.</p> <p>Additionally, the attack has also affected Mabanaft GmbH, an oil supplier. Both entities are subsidiaries of the Marquard & Bahls group, which may have been the breach point.</p> <p>Supply stable but volatile</p> <p>Because the firm supplies a total of 26 companies in the country with fuel, German media raised worries about shortages immediately, but officials came forth to appease them.</p> <p>Shell alone operates 1,955 gas stations in the country, so if they were to run out of fuel, it would cause a crisis that would have an adverse effect on an array of Germany's day-to-day operations, and by extension its national economy.</p> <p>The managing director of the independent tank storage association in Germany, Frank Shaper, told Spiegel that the attack does not endanger the supply of fuel in the country neither on heating nor the transportation aspects.</p> <p>However, the disruption remains significant, and if it takes the firm a long time to resolve the IT problems caused by the attack, the supply chain could also be disrupted.</p> <p>This is mainly due to the automation of the tank loading/unloading process that cannot fall back to manual operations since it relies entirely on computerized systems that are currently offline.</p> <p>Oiltanking operates a total of 13 tank farms in Germany, and currently, these cannot serve trucks. Instead, the firm has resorted to using alternative charging points until the effects of the cyberattack are remediated.</p> <p>Bleeping Computer received the following comment from the company regarding the current situation: <i>On Saturday, January 29th 2022, Oiltanking GmbH Group and Mabanaft GmbH & Co. KG (Mabanaft) Group discovered we have been the victim of a cyber incident affecting our IT systems. Upon learning of the incident, we immediately took steps to enhance the security of our systems and processes and launched an investigation into the matter. We are working to solve this issue according to our contingency plans, as well as to understand the full scope of the incident. We are undertaking a thorough investigation, together with external specialists and are collaborating closely with the relevant authorities. All terminals continue to operate safely.</i></p> <p><i>Oiltanking Deutschland GmbH & Co. KG, an operating unit within the Mabanaft Group, operates all terminals in Germany and is not part of the Oiltanking GmbH Group.</i></p> <p><i>Oiltanking GmbH Group continues to operate all terminals in all global markets. Oiltanking Deutschland GmbH & Co. KG terminals are operating with limited capacity and have declared force majeure. Mabanaft Deutschland GmbH & Co. KG has also declared force majeure for the majority of its inland supply activities in Germany. All parties continue to work to restore operations to normal in all our terminals as soon as possible.</i></p>

	<p>Last week, the German intelligence service, BfV, warned local firms of ongoing cyberattacks coordinated by the APT27 Chinese state-supported hacking group.</p> <p>While the attack on Oiltanking hasn't been attributed to any actors yet, it could be the work of a state actor who seeks to cause large-scale disruption and economic damage.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/01 Secret sharing app 'Whisper' exposed again
SOURCE	https://www.comparitech.com/blog/information-security/secret-sharing-app-exposure/
GIST	<p>Two databases containing user information and messages ostensibly from the secret sharing app Whisper were exposed on the web without a password or any other authentication required to access them, according to Comparitech researchers.</p> <p>One of the databases appears similar to a Whisper database leaked in March 2020, which contained user's messages and locations. The second database is a list of user account information. Although none of the exposed information can be used to directly identify people, it does include age, location and other details that could be used to unmask users.</p> <p>Comparitech's head of security research Bob Diachenko discovered the data sitting unprotected on December 22, 2021. He immediately sent an alert to Whisper, and the data was secured about three days later.</p> <p>Whisper did not acknowledge the incident as of time of publication and Comparitech was unable to reach the company for comment after multiple attempts. We therefore can't be certain that Whisper is responsible for the exposure.</p> <p>Diachenko identified more than 50 IP addresses pointing to the exposed Elasticsearch database. This observation led him to conclude that the data was most likely part of Whisper's native infrastructure and was not exposed by a malicious third party.</p> <p>Timeline of the exposure</p> <p>The data was exposed for at least three days before being secured. Here's what we know happened:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • December 22, 2021 – The databases were indexed by search engines. • December 22, 2021 – Diachenko discovered the database and immediately sent an alert to Whisper as per our responsible disclosure policy. • December 25, 2021 – The databases were no longer publicly accessible. • January 21, 2022 – Comparitech contacted Whisper via email for acknowledgment of Diachenko's disclosure and fact checking. We never received a response. Follow ups via social media likewise never got a reply. <p>We do not know if any unauthorized parties accessed the data while it was exposed, but our honeypot experiments show it normally takes just a few hours for attackers to find and steal unprotected data.</p> <p>What data was exposed?</p> <p>Each of the 50+ IP addresses pointed to two Elasticsearch clusters:</p> <p>The "users" cluster contained 361 million records. Each record contained some or all of the following info:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Username and nickname • User ID numbers • Several shared secrets, secret keys, and tokens • User's geolocation • Engagement statistics such as number of posts, likes, and timestamps of the user's most recent interactions <p>The "whispers_v3" database contained 1.2 billion records, each with some or all of the following info:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Message contents • Message timestamps • Username

- Geolocation
- URLs of attached images

Timestamps on a sample of data collected by Comparitech were dated between 2013 and 2016.

Dangers of exposed data

Whisper is an anonymous secret sharing app where users can share intimate messages and posts. Given that anonymity is the app's main selling point, users have an expectation of privacy.

The data, if genuine, exposes Whisper user's supposedly secret messages along with their geolocation and other information. Although no names, email addresses, or other directly identifying information was exposed, a determined attacker could potentially use the available data to find and identify users. That could lead to blackmail, stalking, harassment, or other crimes.

About Whisper

Whisper launched in 2012 on Android and iOS. The free app allows users to "anonymously" post and share messages and videos. It reached 10 million monthly active users in April 2015. The company is currently owned by MediaLab, which also owns Kik messenger and the Imgur image sharing site.

The company drew heavy criticism in 2014 when [the Guardian reported](#) that the company gathered location data on its users, including some who had opted out.

In 2017, [Whisper laid off 20 percent of its staff, lost its entire board of directors, and saw its COO leave](#). In [March 2020, the Washington Post reported that Whisper exposed](#) its message database on the web, revealing 900 million user records from the app's release in 2012 to then-present day.

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HEADLINE	02/02 Iran state TV streaming site targeted
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/iran-state-tv-streaming-site-targeted-dissident-message-82618598
GIST	<p>DUBAI, United Arab Emirates -- A streaming website that features Iranian state television programming has acknowledged suffering technical issues amid reports that dissident hackers played an anti-government message on the platform.</p> <p>Telewebion said it suffered "infrastructure" irregularities Tuesday and suffered an archive failure, without elaborating on the cause.</p> <p>The problems came as a video message circulated online claiming to be from a self-described group of hackers called "The Justice of Ali" in Farsi. In the video, which Farsi-language news networks abroad say played on the streaming platform, a masked man appears and a muffled voice says Iran's government "will no longer silence us."</p> <p>"We'll burn hijabs. We'll burn their pictures and propaganda posters," the man says. "We will break their idols. We will reveal their palaces so that the people can punish them."</p> <p>"The Justice of Ali" did not immediately respond to a request for comment via an account it used in an earlier conversation with The Associated Press. In August it released footage showing grim condition at Iran's notorious Evin prison it claimed it obtained through a hack.</p> <p>The video comes just ahead of commemoration ceremonies for Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution this month. It also follows an apparent hack Thursday that saw multiple channels of Iran's state television broadcast images showing the leaders of an exiled dissident group and a graphic calling for the death of the country's supreme leader.</p>

The incident Tuesday potentially marks the latest in a series of embarrassing cyberattacks against the Islamic Republic, as world powers struggle to revive a tattered nuclear deal with Tehran. Other attacks, which Iran has blamed on Israel, have targeted its nuclear program.

In October, an assault on Iran's fuel distribution system paralyzed gas stations nationwide, leading to long lines of angry motorists unable to get subsidized fuel for days. An earlier cyberattack on Iran's railway system caused chaos and train delays.

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Terror Conditions

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HEADLINE	02/02 Rarity to experts: woman in senior ISIS role
SOURCE	https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2022/02/02/allison-fluke-ekren-women-terror-groups/9288661002/
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON – Three weeks ago, an imprisoned woman known as "Lady al-Qaida" inspired a hostage-taking at a Texas synagogue. This week, an American woman appeared in court on charges she trained other women in the Islamic State and plotted bomb attacks.</p> <p>International terrorism charges against women are extremely rare, according to experts, because men tend to dominate the misogynistic groups such as al-Qaida, the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham, or ISIS, and related groups in Pakistan, Afghanistan and elsewhere around the world. But a dozen cases over the last decade of U.S. citizens or permanent residents revealed women shedding traditional caretaker roles to recruit fellow warriors, train others to use rifles and explosives, and even kill.</p> <p>Veteran counter-terrorism officials say that while the latest case against Allison Fluke-Ekren, a former teacher from Kansas, is unusual in terms of the senior operational rank she allegedly achieved in ISIS, women have played important roles in the international Islamic jihad movement.</p> <p>"I think it's startling to the American people because they're like, 'Wait, women do this too?' But they've been doing it all along," Tracy Walder, a former CIA counter-terrorism officer who served extensively in the Middle East, told USA TODAY.</p> <p>Fluke-Ekren, 42, is accused of plotting U.S. bomb attacks at a college or a shopping mall, and allegedly training a female ISIS battalion in Syria how to use AK-47 rifles, grenades and suicide belts, according to court records. Her first court appearance was Monday and she has a detention hearing scheduled Thursday.</p> <p>"What is unique with this case is the allegation that she was the leader of her own brigade. Especially for someone coming from the west, this is exceptionally rare," said Amarnath Amarasingam, a terrorism expert at Queen's University in Ontario, Canada, and associate fellow at the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation.</p> <p>Besides Americans joining the fight, the ranks of women in ISIS could grow because Syria detained thousands of women and children who could become recruits for the Islamic terror groups, experts say.</p> <p>"Fluke-Ekren and other women were able to assume roles in combat units and provide ideas for attacks abroad, which made them different since women in al-Qaida and its associated groups had more traditional family responsibilities," Javed Ali, a former senior U.S. counterterrorism official at the FBI and Defense Department and at the National Security Council in the Trump administration, told USA TODAY.</p> <p>The Islamic State's power and influence peaked in 2015 with between 20,000 and 32,000 fighters in Iraq and Syria. But Ali and other current and former U.S. counter-terrorism officials fear it is rebuilding – and once again training its sights on American targets.</p>

Fluke-Ekren rose in stature with ISIS while her former husbands were killed, according to court records. One late husband was a sniper trainer for the group, another husband specialized in drones before his death and a third husband was responsible for defending Raqqa, where ISIS was headquartered, according to court records. Her lawyer, Joseph King, declined to comment.

Walder, author of the 2020 book "The Unexpected Spy," said in as male-dominated an environment as ISIS, Fluke-Ekren would likely have been helped immeasurably by those alleged marriages to a number of prominent and influential male leaders – especially ones who died fighting and became martyrs for the cause.

"As a female, I'm sure that it wasn't, 'Let's all bow down to her,' " Walder said of the men in ISIS. "However, I think she was respected enough to give her the position that she had," if the accusations listed in the charges against Fluke-Ekren are true.

Brian Levin, a former New York police officer who monitors extremist groups, said having an American woman as a member of such an international Islamic terrorist organization is considered highly advantageous because they are familiar with the United States and engender less suspicion.

"Not only was she radicalized from the heartland and traveled overseas for one, but she actually participated in an all-female fighting force," said Levin, a professor of criminal justice and director of the Center for the Study of Hate & Extremism at California State University–San Bernardino. "While there is debate in some extremist circles about the role of women and Americans, in some organizations they are highly prized because they are not the 'stereotypical' terrorist."

Women contributing to Islamic terrorist causes are rare, but not unique.

The FBI estimated that 300 people left the U.S. to try and join jihadists in Iraq and Syria since 2011, according to [a 2018 report by George Washington University's Program on Extremism](#). Of the 64 the report studied in detail, 89 percent were men, the report said.

Many of the women implicated in terrorism became involved with their husbands, just as Fluke-Ekren's husbands were also active in ISIS.

An Alabama woman, [Arwa Muthana](#), was arrested with her husband, James Bradley, in April 2021 and charged with trying to support the Islamic State when they tried to travel to the Middle East aboard a cargo ship leaving from Newark, New Jersey. They have pleaded not guilty.

Jaelyn Delshaun Young of Starkville, Mississippi, and her husband, Muhammad Oda Dakhalla, pleaded guilty in 2016 to conspiring to support ISIS as Mississippi State University students who sought to travel to Syria.

Participants in terrorist groups – including some women – have brought the fight to America. A Pakistani-born permanent resident of the U.S., Tashfeen Malik, and her husband [killed 14 people and injured another 22 at a holiday party](#) in San Bernardino, California, in December 2015. The [FBI investigated it as a terrorist incident](#), saying the couple was radicalized by foreign terrorist organizations.

Some American women have admitted recruiting others for violent attacks or raising money for the Islamic State.

A Wisconsin woman, [Waheba Issa Dais](#), pleaded guilty in 2019 to attempting to support the Islamic State through Facebook accounts encouraging people to conduct attacks and distributing information about how to make explosives and biological weapons.

A New York woman, [Zoobia Shahnaz](#), pleaded guilty in 2018 to supporting the Islamic State by raising more than \$150,000 in wire transfers to Pakistan, China and Turkey.

A Georgia woman, [Kim Anh Vo](#), pleaded guilty in June 2019 to conspiring to support the online group United Cyber Caliphate, which distributed propaganda online and posted lists of thousands of people targeted for killing in the New York City area.

Role of women in jihadist movements is a topic of debate

Terrorism scholars have long debated the role of women in jihadist movements, whether in raising families or joining the fight.

“There has always been contradictory information coming from their own propaganda, sometimes arguing that their role is primarily domestic and other times arguing that combat roles may be required,” said Amarasingam from Queen’s University.

Before Fluke-Ekren, there was Aafia Siddiqui, commonly known as “Lady al-Qaida.” Siddiqui was detained in July 2008 by Afghan authorities, who found handwritten notes in her possession about a “mass casualty attack” listing locations such as the Empire State Building, the Statue of Liberty and the Brooklyn Bridge.

As U.S. troops tried to interview her in Ghazni, Afghanistan, she grabbed an Army officer’s M-4 rifle and fired it at others while vowing to kill Americans. Siddiqui learned how to use firearms as a student in Boston, according to evidence at her trial.

She is [serving an 86 year prison sentence](#) at a federal prison in Fort Worth, Texas, after being convicted in 2010 of attempting to murder U.S. troops in Afghanistan. Last month, a British national, [Malik Faisal Akram, took hostages](#) at the Congregation Beth Israel synagogue near Dallas, demanding Siddiqui’s release before authorities shot him to death.

Women are not new to the broader Islamist cause either. Before Siddiqui, there were the Tamil Tigers, a Sri Lankan insurgent group that pioneered the use of female suicide bombers in the 1970s as it rose to become what the [FBI would later describe as the “most dangerous and deadly extremist outfit](#) in the world.”

And before the Tamil Tigers, there was [Leila Khaled, the longtime active leader of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine](#). A former Palestinian refugee, Khaled rose to fame for becoming the first female airplane hijacker, first as part of the team terrorizing TWA Flight 840 from Rome to Tel Aviv in 1969 and another flight headed from Amsterdam to New York City a year later.

In recent decades, al-Qaida has also trained and equipped women to become terrorists, including the notorious Chechen squad known as the “Black Widows.”

From 2000 to 2006, [female terrorists were involved in 22 of the 27 suicide attacks attributed to Chechen rebels](#), one of many militant groups around the world that are allied with al-Qaida, according to Anne Speckhard, the director of the International Center for the Study of Violent Extremism.

The Black Widows included the first Chechen female suicide bombers, Khava Barayeva and Luisa Magomadova, who detonated a truck filled with explosives June 7, 2000, at the temporary headquarters of an elite Russian Special Forces unit, Speckhard said.

Speckhard, who has worked with U.S., NATO and United Nations counter-terrorism agencies, has personally interviewed at least 273 ISIS members, mostly in Iraq and Syria. About one-quarter of the subjects were women and each interview lasted at least two hours, she said.

She said that even among international terrorist organizations, ISIS has been particularly brutal in its treatment of women. Many have been subjected to sex trafficking and human slavery, and suffered harsh physical punishments for violating strict Islamist rules restricting their personal freedom and education.

But ISIS warmed to the idea of using female terrorist operatives in circumstances where they could be more successful than males, such as hiding bombs under their loose clothing while passing through checkpoints. But women still served their husbands first, and the other males of ISIS second, she said. Speckhard voiced skepticism about the charge that Fluke-Ekrent trained a battalion of female ISIS fighters.

"They were not training all the women. There's no way. I have 273 in-depth ISIS interviews, and I've never heard that. Ever," Speckhard said. "I heard from one Albanian in Kosovo that said, 'I trained my wife to shoot so that when we left them alone to go and fight in the ISIS battles, that if they got attacked they could pick up a weapon and shoot.' But that was it."

Experts say ISIS is extremely misogynistic and chauvinistic toward women, and would never allow a woman to ascend to any position of authority in the overall organization.

But the terror network did use women to train other women and children in how to use weapons and suicide bomb techniques, they said. And [ISIS also allowed women to join its brutal morality police](#) known by various names, including [hisbah](#) or the Khansa Brigades.

"As a woman, she wouldn't have been allowed to have authority over men, which basically rules out most of what matters in ISIS," said Peter Neumann, professor of Security Studies at the Department of War Studies at King's College London.

"She might, however, have been a significant player in the Khansa Brigades, whereby women were policing women's behavior," said Neumann, author of seven books on terrorism, including "Radicalized: New Jihadists and the Threat to the West."

The [morality police -- men and women alike -- would patrol the ISIS stronghold of Raqqa toting Kalashnikov automatic rifles](#), and would enforce a dress code that required women to cover every inch of their bodies in black, including their hands, feet and eyes.

"If you got on the wrong side of the hisbah, you got hauled into prison. And if you were a woman, you were undressed, and flogged, or they bit you with metal teeth," Speckhard said. "I've seen pictures of scars and had it described to me and some women were bitten so badly that they bled to death."

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HEADLINE	02/01 DOJ rejects testimony obtained by torture
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/01/us/politics/torture-guantanamo-terrorism-biden.html
GIST	<p>The Biden administration has pledged to no longer invoke statements made by a prisoner during his years in C.I.A. custody in his death-penalty proceedings, repudiating an earlier effort to use evidence obtained from torture in a case at Guantánamo Bay.</p> <p>Last year, the veteran chief prosecutor for war crimes, Brig. Gen. Mark S. Martins, had argued that such evidence could be used in pretrial proceedings, before a jury was chosen. He left the job in September after disagreeing with lawyers for the Biden administration over the pretrial litigation tactic.</p> <p>Now the Justice Department has rejected that interpretation. A 37-page filing submitted Monday night at the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit said the law governing military commission trials at Guantánamo Bay "prohibits the admission of statements obtained through torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment at all phases of a military commission."</p> <p>The filing, however, did not entirely foreclose the possibility that a future U.S. government might choose to interpret the law that governs military commissions differently, and try to use evidence obtained through torture. Instead, the Justice Department asked the appeals court to step aside and let military judges at Guantánamo Bay decide the question as it comes up.</p>

“If a dispute arises regarding any past orders or any future attempt to admit such statements, the issue should be adjudicated in the first instance, in its specific concrete context, in the military courts below,” the brief said. It was signed by Col. [George C. Kraehe](#), the acting chief prosecutor for military commissions and a former Justice Department lawyer who was recently mobilized to the Army, and [Matthew G. Olsen](#), the assistant attorney general for national security.

Lawyers brought the appeal on behalf of Abd al-Rahim al-Nashiri, a Saudi man who is accused of plotting Al Qaeda’s suicide bombing of the U.S. Navy destroyer Cole off Yemen in 2000. Seventeen U.S. sailors were killed in the attack.

Mr. Nashiri was captured two years later and spent four years in C.I.A. custody, where psychologists working for the agency and other interrogators subjected him to waterboarding, isolation, sleep deprivation and mock execution. His case has been bogged down in pretrial proceedings for a decade as the court tries to deal with the legacy of the torture.

The issue has not arisen in Guantánamo’s better known capital case against five men accused of plotting the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks. But the Nashiri challenge was seen as a test of how civilian courts viewed the limits on the use of evidence derived through torture at the military commissions, the hybrid federal-military court that Congress created to try foreigners on terror and war crimes charges.

The challenge arose out of a classified government filing in the case in March.

In it, prosecutors quoted something that Mr. Nashiri said in 2002 during a particularly brutal C.I.A. interrogation to end his defense team’s quest for information about a 2015 drone strike in Syria that killed another Qaeda figure, Mohsen al-Fadhli.

Mr. Nashiri’s lawyers were exploring a potential defense theory that the United States had already killed plotters of the Cole attack who were more senior and more culpable. The prosecutors asked the judge to end that line of inquiry, pointing to a classified cable that said Mr. Nashiri had told C.I.A. agents as he was being interrogated at a secret prison in Afghanistan that Mr. Fadhli had not been involved.

Defense lawyers said the law prohibited the use of the statement — or any statement by a defendant that was derived from torture or any other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment — throughout the entire proceedings. Prosecutors argued there was an exception for the period when a judge decided pretrial matters before a military jury was chosen to hear a case.

The military judge, Col. Lanny J. Acosta Jr., agreed with the prosecutors in a [ruling](#) dated May 18, 2021, that still stands.

Defense lawyers in the case said Tuesday that they were troubled by the language in the Justice Department filing that left open the possibility of an exception for a future administration, particularly given the longevity of the prosecution. It was originally conceived by the Bush administration and pursued by the Obama administration. It has been subject to long delays caused by both prosecution and defense appeals of rulings by the Guantánamo judges.

“It is a cause for concern,” said Michel Paradis, an appellate lawyer for Mr. Nashiri, who works for the Department of Defense. “The Trump administration took a very different view of torture than the Biden administration does. And this pleading leaves open the discretion to change their position.”

Also of concern, he said, was the government’s disclosure in the filing on Monday night that a war court prosecutor, in a review of 100,000 pages of secret filings, discovered another instance when prosecutors invoked something Mr. Nashiri told the C.I.A. at one of their black sites. It was in a 2014 filing.

	Defense lawyers were unaware of the use of the statement from the black sites because, at the national security court, prosecutors can give information to the judge unilaterally in a process that enables them to protect, redact or rephrase classified information. The defense lawyers were weighing on Tuesday whether to seek a more vigorous, independent examination of the 100,000 pages.
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HEADLINE	02/01 Norway denies parole to mass murderer
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/01/world/europe/anders-behring-breivik-norway-parole.html
GIST	<p>Anders Behring Breivik, the Norwegian terrorist who killed 77 people in gun and bomb attacks in 2011, was denied parole on Tuesday by a Norwegian court that said he “appeared devoid of empathy and compassion for the victims of the terror.”</p> <p>Mr. Breivik, 42, who has served 10 years of a 21-year sentence for the attacks, showed no signs that his extremist views had waned during his years of incarceration. When the parole hearing began on Jan. 18, he entered the courtroom and made a Nazi-style salute. He also carried and wore signs emblazoned with racist messages, including one that read “Stop your genocide against our white nations.”</p> <p>Speaking to the judge, Mr. Breivik demanded that he be treated as a prisoner of war.</p> <p>Judge Dag Bjorvik oversaw the parole hearing, which lasted for two weeks and was held at Skien prison for security reasons.</p> <p>Mr. Breivik’s lawyer, Oystein Storrvik, said on Tuesday that they would appeal the verdict, after expressing pessimism at the start of the hearing. “No Norwegian lawyer wants a case to begin with a Hitler salute,” he said in an interview with The Times last month. He said he was not particularly concerned with Mr. Breivik winning his parole, adding that his long-term strategy was to “improve the conditions under which he is sitting” in prison.</p> <p>On July 22, 2011, Mr. Breivik detonated a fertilizer bomb in downtown Oslo, killing eight people. He then went on a shooting rampage at a summer camp on the island of Utoya, killing 69 people, most of them teenagers. The camp was organized by the youth arm of the country’s center-left Labor Party.</p> <p>The judgment said Mr. Breivik “verbally expressed grief over those affected — but at the same time, he defended and possibly legitimized his actions by saying that most of those affected on Utoya were not children, but people with ‘leadership positions.’ This despite the fact that he must know that among those killed were children as young as 14 years old.”</p> <p>At the start of the parole hearing, Hulda Karlsdottir, the lead prosecutor, said that Mr. Breivik should remain in prison and that he would “remain dangerous after serving his sentence.”</p> <p>She added: “Both the survivors and relatives alike are left with bottomless grief, and the atrocities committed are unparalleled in Norwegian history.”</p> <p>Mr. Breivik, who legally changed his name to Fjotolf Hansen in 2017, said he had carried out the attack as part of a violent campaign against what he characterized as a Muslim invasion of Europe, which he said was contributing to the country’s “cultural suicide.”</p> <p>Mr. Breivik was convicted on terrorism and murder charges in 2012 and sentenced to 21 years in prison, the maximum under Norwegian law. The sentence can be extended indefinitely if he is deemed a continued threat to society.</p> <p>The parole hearing, revived memories of the most horrific crime in modern Norwegian history, and showcased the extremist views of the country’s neo-Nazi fringe.</p> <p>In past court appearances, Mr. Breivik has betrayed little emotion when recounting his deeds. His crimes, which he detailed in a sprawling 1,500 page tract discovered after the attacks, have since influenced right-</p>

	<p>wing extremists around the world, including an American white nationalist, Christopher Paul Hasson, who was indicted on federal gun and drug charges and accused of plotting to commit mass murder.</p> <p>Mr. Breivik last appeared before Norwegian and European courts in 2016 to argue that his long-term solitary confinement amounted to torture. He is being held in a three-room suite that includes a treadmill, a refrigerator, a television with a DVD player and a Sony PlayStation. He has also threatened to go on a hunger strike.</p> <p>Lisbeth Kristine Royneland, a spokeswoman for the families of victims and survivors of the attacks, said the decision was “as expected,” and only confirmed what they had heard in previous rounds in court: “The terrorist is very dangerous and must not be released.”</p> <p>The judgment Tuesday said that Mr. Breivik posed the same risk to society today that he did when he was first sentenced.</p> <p>“In the court’s view, it cannot be assumed that the accused comes across as nonviolent,” the ruling said. “His verbal assurances and his words of honor are of little value, even if meant sincerely in the moment they are spoken.”</p> <p>Ms. Royneland, whose daughter Synne Royneland was killed during the attack on Utoya, said that with appeals and Mr. Breivik’s attention-seeking stunts, “It feels like he is poking at a wound that is never allowed to heal.”</p>
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HEADLINE	02/02 IS hits back amid Iraq, Syria power vacuum
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/islamic-state-hits-back-aided-by-power-vacuum-iraq-syria-2022-02-02/
GIST	<p>JALAWLA, Iraq, Feb 2 (Reuters) - Yousif Ibrahim no longer travels by night along the roads around his hometown of Jalawla in northeastern Iraq. He fears getting caught up in attacks by Islamic State.</p> <p>"The police and army don't come into our area much anymore. If they do, they get shot at by militants," said the 25-year-old, who sells fish for a living in a nearby market.</p> <p>Nearly three years after the group lost its final enclave, Islamic State fighters are re-emerging as a deadly threat, aided by the lack of central control in many areas, according to a dozen security officials, local leaders and residents in northern Iraq.</p> <p>Islamic State is far from the formidable force it once was, but militant cells often operating independently have survived across a swathe of northern Iraq and northeastern Syria, and in recent months they have launched increasingly brazen attacks.</p> <p>"Daesh (Islamic State) isn't as powerful as it was in 2014," said Jabar Yawar, a senior official in the Peshmerga forces of Iraq's northern autonomous Kurdistan region.</p> <p>"Its resources are limited and there's no strong joint leadership," he told Reuters in the city of Sulaimaniya. "But as long as political disputes aren't solved, Daesh will come back."</p> <p>Some fear that could be starting to happen.</p> <p>In late January, Islamic State carried out one of its deadliest attacks against the Iraqi army for years, killing 11 soldiers in a town near Jalawla, according to security sources.</p> <p>The same day, its militants stormed a prison in Syria under the control of U.S.-backed Kurdish militia in an attempt to free inmates loyal to the group.</p>

It was the biggest attack by Islamic State since the collapse of its self-declared caliphate in 2019. At least 200 prison inmates and militants were killed, as well as 40 Kurdish troops, 77 prison guards and four civilians.

Officials and residents in northern Iraq and eastern Syria lay much of the blame on rivalries between armed groups. When Iraqi, Syrian, Iranian and U.S.-led forces declared Islamic State beaten, they faced off against each other across the territory it had ruled.

Now Iran-backed militias attack U.S. forces. Turkish forces bomb Kurdish separatist militants. A territorial dispute rumbles on between Baghdad and Iraq's autonomous Kurdish region.

The tensions are undermining security and good governance, causing [confusion](#) that Islamic State once thrived on.

For Ibrahim, that means crossing checkpoints manned variously by Iraqi soldiers and Shi'ite Muslim paramilitaries to get to work in a town controlled until a few years ago by Kurds.

The remote farmland between each military outpost is where Islamic State militants hide out, according to local officials.

A similar pattern plays out across the 400-mile corridor of mountains and desert through northern Iraq and into Syria where Islamic State once dominated.

Towns like Jalawla bear the scars of fierce fighting five or so years ago - buildings reduced to rubble and scarred with bullet holes. Banners honouring slain commanders from different armed groups jostle for space in town squares.

IRAQI DISPUTES

In some parts of Iraq where Islamic State operates, the main dispute is between the government in Baghdad and the autonomous northern Kurdish region, home to huge deposits of oil and strategic territory that both sides claim.

The jihadists' deadliest attacks in Iraq in recent months have taken place in those areas. Dozens of soldiers, Kurdish fighters and residents have been killed in violence that local officials blamed on militants loyal to the group.

According to Yawar, Islamic State fighters use the no-man's-land between Iraqi army, Kurdish and Shi'ite militia checkpoints to regroup.

"The gaps between the Iraqi army and the Peshmerga are sometimes 40 km (25 miles) wide," he said.

Mohammed Jabouri, an Iraqi army commander in the province of Salahuddin, said the militants tended to operate in groups of 10-15 people.

Because of the lack of agreement over territorial control, there are areas where neither the Iraqi army nor Kurdish forces can enter to pursue them, he added.

"That's where Daesh is active," he told Reuters by telephone.

Iraqi state paramilitary forces aligned with Iran in theory coordinate with the Iraqi army, but some local officials say that does not always happen.

"The problem is that local commanders, the army and the paramilitaries ... sometimes don't recognise each other's authority," said Ahmed Zargosh, mayor of Saadia, a town in a disputed area.

"It means Islamic State militants can operate in the gaps."

Zargosh lives outside the town he administers, saying he fears assassination by Islamic State militants if he stays there at night.

SYRIA AND THE BORDERS

Islamic State militants at the other end of the corridor of contested territory, in Syria, are taking advantage of the confusion to operate in sparsely populated areas, according to some officials and analysts.

"Fighters (are) entering villages and towns at night and having complete free rein to operate, raid for food, intimidate businesses and extort 'taxes' from the local population," said Charles Lister, a senior fellow at the Middle East Institute think-tank.

"They've got many more local fissures, be they ethnic, political, sectarian, to exploit to their advantage." Syrian government forces and Iran-backed militias hold territory to the west of the Euphrates river and U.S.-backed Kurdish forces are stationed to its east, including where the prison attack occurred.

The picture on the Iraqi side of the frontier area is no less complex.

Soldiers and fighters aligned with Iran, Turkey, Syria and the West control different segments of land, with separate checkpoints sometimes just a few hundred feet apart.

Iran and its proxy militias seek to maintain control of Iraqi-Syrian border crossings that are Tehran's gateway to Syria and Lebanon, according to Western and Iraqi officials.

U.S. officials blame those militias for attacking the 2,000 or so American troops stationed in Iraq and Syria fighting Islamic State. Tehran has not commented on whether Iran is involved.

Turkey, meanwhile, launches drone strikes from bases in northern Iraq against Kurdish separatist militants operating on either side of the border.

COLLAPSE OF THE CALIPHATE

At the peak of its power from 2014-2017, Islamic State ruled over millions of people and claimed responsibility for or inspired attacks in dozens of cities around the world.

Its leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi declared his caliphate over a quarter of Iraq and Syria in 2014 before he was killed in a raid by U.S. special forces in northwest Syria in 2019 as the group collapsed.

Armed forces in northern Iraq and northeast Syria say that the sheer number of groups, all enemies of Islamic State, would squash any resurgence.

In the wake of the prison assault, the U.S.-led military coalition fighting Islamic State said in a statement that recent attacks had ultimately made it weaker.

Not all local communities are convinced.

"After the Syria prison attack, we're scared Daesh could come back," said Hussein Suleiman, a government worker in the Iraqi town of Sinjar, which Islamic State overran in 2014 and where it slaughtered thousands of members of the Yazidi minority.

"Islamic State came from Syria last time. Iraqi troops and Kurdish forces were here then too, but they fled."

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HEADLINE	02/01 DJI drone maker obscured China funding?
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2022/02/01/china-funding-drones-dji-us-regulators/
GIST	<p>Chinese drone maker DJI, a leading supplier of drones to U.S. law enforcement, obscured its Chinese government funding while claiming that Beijing had not invested in the firm, according to a Washington Post review of company reports and articles posted on the sites of state-owned and -controlled investors, as well as analysis by IPVM, a video surveillance research group.</p> <p>The documents show that four investment bodies owned or administered by Beijing have invested in the popular drone brand in recent years, including a state asset manager that has pledged to play a key role in promoting partnerships between private enterprises and the Chinese military.</p> <p>Brendan Carr, the senior Republican on the Federal Communications Commission, which authorizes DJI's equipment for use on U.S. communications networks, labeled reports of the links as "deeply concerning" in an interview. The FCC proposed changes last year that could severely limit access to U.S. markets for companies deemed a national security risk.</p> <p>Scrutiny of DJI comes as the company is already facing action by U.S. regulators over its ties to Beijing's security apparatus. DJI was among eight Chinese companies added to a U.S. investment blacklist by the Treasury Department in December over sales of its drone equipment to police in Xinjiang, where U.S. officials said it has been used to surveil ethnic Uyghurs. In 2020, the company was added to the Commerce Department's Entity List, restricting its access to U.S. components.</p> <p>The Defense Department clarified last year that its 2017 ban on the purchase of DJI drones remains in place except under very limited circumstances. The Pentagon previously said the Chinese drones pose a national security threat, citing "an increased awareness of cyber vulnerabilities" in the aircraft.</p> <p>DJI still accounts for the majority of consumer drones used in the United States. As of 2020, DJI held 77 percent of the American hobby drone market, while a Bard College study showed that DJI drones accounted for about 90 percent of the drones in its database used by public safety agencies in the United States, including state and local police, as well as fire and emergency services.</p> <p>The company is not publicly traded and its Hong Kong ownership structure means that its full list of investors is not public — highlighting the broader challenges that investors and governments face in uncovering links between private Chinese tech firms and Beijing, according to the Bethlehem, Pa.-based IPVM, which first surfaced some of the financing links between DJI and Chinese state investment funds.</p> <p>DJI did not comment on questions about whether Chinese government-controlled funders were investors in the company, but maintained it had not received "direct" investments from the Chinese government.</p> <p>"DJI is privately held. The company is solely managed by and majority-owned by the founder team. Shareholders other than the founders do not participate in the company's management and operation," said Adam Lisberg, a DJI spokesman.</p> <p>The funds that list DJI as an investment include China Chengtong Holdings Group, which is directly administered by Beijing's State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission (SASAC), a ministerial-level organization tasked by China's State Council to manage the country's state-owned enterprises.</p> <p>"If SASAC isn't the PRC [People's Republic of China] government, I don't know what is. If SASAC has invested in you, that means the Chinese government has invested in you," said Charles Rollet, the IPVM analyst who uncovered the links between DJI and China Chengtong, which invested in DJI through an emerging technologies fund, according to company documents.</p>

“It directly contradicts what [DJI spokespeople] have been touting to allay concerns around the Chinese government,” Rollet said. “DJI has been saying they have no Chinese government investments. This evidence directly contradicts that.”

Other funds that list DJI as an investment include the Shanghai Venture Capital Guidance Fund, which is administered under the Shanghai Municipal Government. Guidance funds in China mix state assets with private funds to advance Beijing’s industrial development goals in emerging industries.

A Chinese-language S&P global report released in March 2021 says that state-run Guangdong Hengjian Investment Holding invested in DJI alongside SenseTime, which was also [added to a sanctions list in December](#) by the Biden administration over alleged rights abuses in Xinjiang.

SDIC Unity Capital a fund administered by the State Development & Investment Corporation (SDIC), a state-owned investment holding company approved by China’s State Council, also lists DJI as an investment on its website.

The four state funds did not respond to requests for comment.

Regulatory backlash

While Americans and most federal and local agencies are not restricted from purchasing DJI drones, further regulatory action could threaten the company’s tight hold on the U.S. market.

“One of the independent bases that we have for taking action at the FCC is the lack of candor, so separate and apart from any national security concern, if you lack candor that contributes to our assessment of whether you are qualified to get FCC authorizations or FCC licenses,” said Carr, the FCC commissioner.

Carr has called for DJI to be added to the FCC’s Covered List, which bans access to federal Universal Service Fund (USF) subsidies that are available to companies for the upkeep of telecommunications infrastructure. Current firms on the list include the Chinese telecommunications giants Huawei and ZTE.

DJI is not directly eligible for USF subsidies and funding, given that it is not a telecommunications provider, said Carr, but the FCC proposed changes last year that would ban equipment authorizations for companies on the Covered List, a move that would mean DJI equipment could not operate legally on U.S. communications infrastructure if the company were added to the list.

In November, President Biden signed into law the Secure Equipment Act, which requires the FCC to adopt such bans for companies on the Covered List before the end of the year.

The FCC has signaled it will take a tougher stance on regulating national security threats, but a spokeswoman wouldn’t comment directly on DJI.

“The FCC has also just asked its national security and law enforcement partners to determine whether updates are needed to the agency’s Covered List in light of new evidence of cyberthreats,” FCC spokeswoman Paloma Perez said.

DJI, founded in 2006 by CEO Frank Wang when he was a student at Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, is one of just a few Chinese technology brands to claim global dominance in high-end consumer hardware over the past decade.

That success is also what has attracted state-owned and -administered investors, according to information posted on the websites of the funds.

China Chengtong invested in DJI through a government fund worth \$55.3 billion, according to a 2018 company report. It’s not clear how much the fund invested. The fund was authorized by China’s State Council and SASAC in 2016 and is headed by China Chengtong’s chief, Zhu Bixin.

An October 2019 article posted on China Chengtong's website confirms the funding and shows images of the fund's deputy party secretary visiting a DJI facility in Shenzhen with a team to "conduct special research" on the investment.

"DJI adheres to the guidance of Xi Jinping thought on socialism with Chinese characteristics for a new era," the article said, referring to China's president.

The tour took place almost exactly a year before DJI posted a "myth busting" blog on its English-language website, saying it received no Chinese government funding amid rising pressure from U.S. regulators.

"DJI did not receive any Chinese government investments, but American venture capital firms invested more than \$100 million," the blog said.

China Chengtong did not respond to emailed requests for comment, but it says on its website that its goals are "to mainly serve the innovation and development of central enterprises ... and increase capital support for major national strategies such as the [Belt and Road project](#) and military-civilian fusion."

Military-civilian fusion is a Chinese policy that was elevated to a national-level strategy in 2015 and is designed to remove barriers between the country's private high-tech enterprises and the People's Liberation Army.

DJI's ongoing Xinjiang sales

While national security concerns landed DJI on the U.S. Commerce Department's Entity List in 2020, it's the company's ties to Xinjiang security operations that have brought the firm under increased scrutiny in the past year.

Cooperation between DJI and Xinjiang's Public Security Department was previously disclosed in a 2017 agreement reported on by [Bloomberg News](#). More recent contracts uncovered by IPVM, the research firm, show that Xinjiang police and other local authorities continue to purchase DJI's technology.

The Post reviewed documents collected by IPVM outlining seven procurement orders for DJI technology by separate Xinjiang police public security departments since 2019, with a combined value of almost \$300,000.

They include a procurement document issued in December by police in Xinjiang's Aksu region that requests \$132,000 worth of DJI drones, which can conduct advanced 3D mapping, according to product specifications. In September, in the northern Xinjiang region of Karamay, the police ordered several advanced DJI drones worth \$75,000.

The purchases highlight the ongoing use of DJI's technology in the Xinjiang region, where experts say over a million ethnic Uyghurs have been detained in recent years as part of a vast crackdown assisted by China's private surveillance industry.

Four other documents outline \$47,000 worth of tenders issued for DJI drones by units of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps. The XPCC, a state paramilitary organization that oversees the administration of several cities and regions in Xinjiang, was added to a sanctions list by the U.S. government in 2020 over human rights abuses.

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HEADLINE	02/01 Extreme heat in oceans 'point of no return'
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/feb/01/extreme-heat-oceans-passed-point-of-no-return-high-temperatures-wildlife-seas
GIST	Extreme heat in the world's oceans passed the "point of no return" in 2014 and has become the new normal, according to research.

Scientists analysed sea surface temperatures over the last 150 years, which have risen because of global heating. They found that extreme temperatures occurring just 2% of the time a century ago have occurred at least 50% of the time across the global ocean since 2014.

In some hotspots, extreme temperatures occur 90% of the time, severely affecting wildlife. More than 90% of the heat trapped by greenhouse gases is absorbed by the ocean, which plays a critical role in maintaining a stable climate.

“By using this measure of extremes, we’ve shown that climate change is not something that is uncertain and may happen in the distant future – it’s something that is a historical fact and has occurred already,” said Kyle Van Houtan, at the Monterey Bay Aquarium, US, and one of the research team. “Extreme climate change is here, it’s in the ocean, and the ocean underpins all life on Earth.”

Van Houtan and his colleague Kisei Tanaka are ecologists and began the study because they wanted to assess how heat extremes were related to the loss of kelp forests off the coast of California.

Advertisement

“Ecology teaches us that extremes have an outsized impact on ecosystems,” Van Houtan said. “We are trying to understand the dramatic changes that we’ve seen along our coasts and in the ocean, on coral reefs, kelp, white sharks, sea otters, fish, and more.”

Other scientists reported in 2019 that the [number of heatwaves affecting the planet’s oceans had increased sharply](#), killing swathes of sea life like “wildfires that take out huge areas of forest”.

Van Houtan and Tanaka found no measure of extreme heat existed and so extended their work globally. The study, [published in the Plos Climate](#) journal, examined the monthly temperature in each one-degree-by-one-degree part of the ocean and set the highest temperature in the 50-year period as the benchmark for extreme heat.

The scientists then examined temperature records from 1920 to 2019, the most recent year available. They found that by 2014, more than 50% of the monthly records across the entire ocean had surpassed the once-in-50-years extreme heat benchmark. The researchers called the year when the percentage passed 50% and did not fall back below it in subsequent years the “point of no return”.

By 2019, the proportion of the global ocean suffering extreme heat was 57%. “We expect this to keep on going up,” said Van Houtan. But the extreme heat was particularly severe in some parts of the ocean, with the South Atlantic having passed the point of no return in 1998. “That was 24 years ago – that is astounding,” he said.

The proportion of the ocean experiencing extreme heat in some large ecosystems is now 80%-90%, with the five worst affected including areas off the north-east coasts of the US and Canada, off Somalia and Indonesia, and in the Norwegian Sea.

“You should care about turtles, seabirds and whales, but even if you don’t, the two most lucrative fisheries in the US, lobster and scallops, are in those exact spots,” said Van Houtan, while 14 fisheries in Alaska have recently been [declared federal disasters](#).

The heat content of the top 2,000 metres of the [ocean set a new record in 2021](#), the sixth in a row. Prof John Abraham at the University of St Thomas in Minnesota, one of the team behind the assessment, said ocean heat content was the most relevant to global climate, while surface temperatures were most relevant to weather patterns, as well as many ecosystems.

“Oceans are critical to understanding climate change. They cover about 70% of the planet’s surface and absorb more than 90% of global warming heat,” Abraham said. “The new study is helpful because the researchers look at the surface temperatures. It finds there has been a big increase in extreme heat at the ocean’s surface and that the extremes are increasing over time.”

HEADLINE	02/01 Activity 'Three Sisters' volcanic region
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/tech/science/environment/researchers-monitoring-ground-swells-three-sisters/281-ecb024a9-ac18-47f6-a7e7-2bdc1dbacbab
GIST	<p>The ground is swelling under the Three Sisters volcanic region in central Oregon.</p> <p>The U.S. Geological Survey issued a statement that the rate of uplift in an area 12 miles across has risen nearly an inch between June of 2020 and August of 2021.</p> <p>Yet, this latest uplift comes after some 25 years of activity. Scientists say it's happening as lava is filling a space underground.</p> <p>"The total is about 30 centimeters, which is about the size of a two-liter pop bottle," said Emily Montgomery-Brown, a research geophysicist at the Cascades Volcano Observatory in Vancouver, Washington. "When this happens at volcanoes, there are often these pulses of lava. And they kind of push the top of the volcano out. It's very slight. So, all of that's happened in the last couple of months."</p> <p>Does this mean an eruption is on its way? Montgomery-Brown says that's not expected. The uplift isn't the only type of clue.</p> <p>Early eruptive activity is usually accompanied by the release of volcanic gasses and a building drumbeat of small earthquakes. There have been some bursts of tiny quakes located inside the uplifted area, according to the Geological Survey.</p> <p>The Pacific Northwest Seismic Network at the University of Washington in Seattle monitors these seismic signals throughout the Cascades - cutting its teeth during the 1980 eruption of Mount St. Helens. Seismic Network Director Harold Tobin said that there's nothing concerning about the earthquake activity around the Sisters.</p> <p>But if Sisters is showing signs of activity, what does that mean for other Cascade volcanoes?</p> <p>"The individual volcanoes are all part of the Cascade chain," Tobin said. "But they are all individual volcanoes — they have a separate sort of plumbing system of magma. But something happening down there at Sisters in Oregon doesn't mean that Mount Rainier is going to change its activity."</p>
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Crime, Criminals

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HEADLINE	02/01 Tacoma residents fed up by street racers
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/tacoma-neighbors-fed-up-after-night-of-chaotic-street-racing
GIST	<p>TACOMA, Wash. - Street racers descended on Tacoma over the weekend causing mayhem and havoc for the people who live in the city, and it was caught on-camera.</p> <p>From Friday night into early Saturday morning, Tacoma Police say they responded to 11 separate street-racing related calls.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 8:50 p.m. at 700 Middle Waterway• 9:24 p.m. at 3100 South 38th Street• 9:24 p.m. at South 47th Street and South Oakes Street• 9:55 p.m. at South 9th Street and Pacific Avenue• 10:30 p.m. at East 72nd Street and East McKinley Avenue• 11:13 p.m. at South 84th Street and South Park Avenue

- 11:35 p.m. at South 84th Street and M Street (This was a call for a hit-and-run. A driver ran into a car full of people. Then the driver took off abandoning the car. This incident happened blocks away from the previous call for street racing.)
- 11:49 p.m. at 6th Avenue and North Alder Street
- 12:14 a.m. at 3700 South Tacoma Way
- 12:38 a.m. at South 72nd street and Pacific Avenue
- 1:08 a.m. at East 11th Street and East Alexander Avenue

These calls came in with reports of 30 to 50 racers, in some instances, doing donuts, burnouts and even starting fires in the street.

"I see flames shooting up that are about a one-story house high," said Sarah.

Sarah lives near the incident that happened at 84th Street and South Park Avenue. She did not want to use her last name.

She says she and her partner have lived in their home for about two years. She says they love their neighborhood and their neighbors, but are terrified after this past weekend.

"We have a lawless city right now," she said.

During the night, Tacoma Police report no arrests. In a lot of these situations, police move racers along, and they just end up in a different location, police tell FOX 13 News.

The city of Tacoma worked to crack down on street racing about a year ago. The city's efforts followed a violent incident involving an officer who responded to a street racing meet up, and then ran over several people.

However, even after the effort, it is nearly impossible to enforce street racing laws.

New state laws, prevent police from chasing after suspects who are wanted for reckless driving.

Tacoma Police also say they will not pursue a suspect if there is any endangerment to the community.

This creates a situation where enforcement is only an option if the suspect, involved with street racing, decides not to flee the scene, and pulls over for a responding officer to receive a citation.

"There are no repercussions; my neighbors don't want to call the cops anymore," said Sarah.

Sarah says the issues are larger than just destruction of property. She says some of her neighbors were threatened.

Sarah says it has gotten to a point where she is ready to move.

"We are traumatized, deeply traumatized, and tired we're tired. And something has to change because this isn't the city that we love," she said.

Despite the challenges in enforcement, Tacoma Police are putting an effort forward to crack down on street racing.

During the night of these incidents, there was a street racing emphasis unit already out patrolling.

Officials with TPD say they may not be able to use enforcement during the actual incident, but police are working with the investigation division to ID suspects in these street racing meet-ups and follow up with citations and charges.

HEADLINE	02/01 Fury: early release Chicago cop in murder
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/feb/01/chicago-police-officer-early-release-murder-black-teenager
GIST	<p>The early release from prison of a white Chicago police officer who was sentenced to about seven years for the murder of a Black teenager in 2014 has sparked anger among relatives, community organizers and politicians who are questioning the decision to shave three years off his sentence for ‘good behavior’.</p> <p>Jason Van Dyke, who was convicted of murder in 2018, was sentenced to six years and nine months for the murder of 17-year-old Laquan McDonald, after video showed Van Dyke shooting the teenager 16 times.</p> <p>Van Dyke is now set to be released on 3 February, almost three years ahead of schedule. He will remain on parole for at least two years.</p> <p>Members of McDonald’s family, local activists and political leaders have voiced their fury over Van Dyke’s early release, noting that he served just a fraction of the 18 years prosecutors originally sought, let alone the maximum 96 years Van Dyke could have received for his charges.</p> <p>In a press conference last Thursday held by McDonald’s relatives at a local church, his grandmother, Tracie Hunter, called Van Dyke’s punishment a “slap on the wrist”, according to the Chicago Tribune. “I just want justice, the right justice,” Hunter said. “I’m not going to rest or be satisfied until this man does his rightful time.”</p> <p>“It’s crazy how I go to a cemetery and talk to a tombstone while this man can talk to his wife and two kids,” said Tanesha Hunter, McDonald’s aunt, in a separate press conference on Monday.</p> <p>Local activists have led several protests over the past week, including a rally outside Illinois governor JB Pritzker’s home last Friday. A number of actions are planned for Thursday, when Van Dyke will be released.</p> <p>“He represents all the officers who we could not hold accountable, or that the justice system has not held accountable yet,” community organizer William Calloway told the Chicago Tribune, listing other people killed by Chicago police officers including 29-year-old Flint Farmer in 2011, 15-year-old Dakota Bright in 2012, 15-year-old Michael Westley in 2013, and 19-year-old Roshad McIntosh and 25-year old Ronald Johnson III in 2014.</p> <p>The Reverend Jesse Jackson said he is also organizing a march for Thursday and has joined other organizers in calling for the justice department to pursue federal civil rights crimes against Van Dyke. A federal investigation was opened in 2015 but charges were never filed.</p> <p>“We all know that 81 months is not enough to fully hold Van Dyke accountable and we know that there is a movement in this city. That is the reason why Van Dyke is behind bars, so we are reactivating that movement,” Jazmine Salas of the Chicago Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression, one of the organizations that signed a letter to the Department of Justice asking for federal charges, told WTTW.</p> <p>Pritzker himself has been critical of Van Dyke’s shortened sentence, saying last Friday that he was “disappointed” in the outcome.</p> <p>“The justice system isn’t always just, and I do not think that the outcome of sentencing of Jason Van Dyke was proper,” the governor said. “I am disappointed and I would have rather seen a different outcome. But this is where we are.”</p> <p>Backlash against Van Dyke’s release has been magnified by Chicago’s shaky record on police reform after McDonald’s murder and more police-involved shootings since, despite a consent decree mandating reform. The decree was issued after a blistering justice department investigation into the Chicago police department found excessive, racist force and widespread corruption.</p>

“We are not where we want to be when it comes to police reform and accountability, but we are further along in two-plus years of doing this work than any other city that has been under consent decree,” said the Chicago mayor, Lori Lightfoot.

Jamie Kalven, the investigative journalist who broke the Laquan McDonald story and founded the non-profit Invisible Institute, told [ABC7 Chicago](#) that despite “discernible progress in some discrete areas, we have thus far failed and our institutions have failed to really rise to that challenge”.

“The verdict is far more important than the sentence, and I’m not sure we’d be in a different place as a city right now if Jason Van Dyke had gotten 12 years or 20 years,” [said Kalven](#).

In October 2014, Van Dyke and another officer responded to calls of a teenager carrying a knife and allegedly damaging cars in the South Side area of Chicago. Within six seconds of exiting his police vehicle, Van Dyke shot McDonald 16 times as the teenager was walking away. Many of the bullets hit McDonald as he fell to the ground.

Three other police officers, all acquitted of any charges but ultimately [fired from the department in 2019](#), filed false police reports accusing McDonald of lunging towards officers with a knife and failing to interview eyewitnesses who saw the shooting. Discrepancies in their accounts were only uncovered once dash cam footage from Van Dyke’s car showing McDonald’s murder was released.

The murder sparked nationwide protests and global coverage. Many accused then [mayor Rahm Emanuel](#), who was [recently confirmed as US ambassador to Japan](#), of a coverup ahead of his reelection campaign in 2015, after video of the shooting was withheld for more than a year.

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HEADLINE	02/01 Virus outbreak remote Australia prison
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/02/01/world/covid-19-cases-vaccine#a-virus-outbreak-at-a-remote-australian-prison-prompts-calls-for-emergency-action
GIST	<p>An Aboriginal legal service in Australia is calling on the federal government to take emergency action to tackle a coronavirus outbreak at a remote prison in the Northern Territory, where about half of the inmates, many of them Indigenous, have contracted the virus in recent weeks.</p> <p>About 300 of the more than 600 prisoners at the Alice Springs Correctional Center, about a 15-hour drive south of the Northern Territory’s capital, Darwin, have Covid, according to David Woodroffe, the principal legal officer of the North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency, which is funded by the federal government.</p> <p>He said the organization was asking the government to give the most at-risk prisoners either early or temporary release, and to ensure that those already sickened by the virus are adequately cared for. Legal services in other states have made similar requests.</p> <p>Australia, which shifted to a living with the virus strategy from a “zero Covid” one, recorded an average of 53,353 cases per day in the last week, according to the Center for Systems Science and Engineering at Johns Hopkins University. There have been a total of more than two million confirmed cases across the country.</p> <p>By some estimates, Indigenous Australians are the most incarcerated people in the world. They make up 3.3 percent of the country’s population but account for about 30 percent of its inmates. In the Northern Territory, nearly 85 percent of those imprisoned are Indigenous.</p> <p>According to local government data, the vast majority of prisoners at the Alice Springs facility have received two doses of a coronavirus vaccine, and a small number has received a booster. But Indigenous Australians, who are disproportionately represented in the country’s prison population, also have higher rates of chronic disease that place them at higher risk of complications from Covid-19.</p>

	"We have to address this as an emergency," Mr. Woodroffe said.
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HEADLINE	02/01 Skagit, Whatcom Co. fire stations break-ins
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/fire-stations-burglarized-skagit-whatcom-counties/UNGXULU3KZGILORMFOXMQKPJB4/
GIST	<p>ACME and MOUNT VERNON, Wash. — Fire stations in Skagit and Whatcom counties are missing vital tools after break-ins over the last few days.</p> <p>The first burglary happened at Whatcom County Fire District 16's fire station 86 in Acme on Saturday.</p> <p>When volunteer firefighters arrived at the station to respond to a car crash, they found that equipment storage doors on every truck were open and equipment was missing.</p> <p>More than \$18,000 worth of life-saving equipment was stolen, including five power saws, two generators, a combination battery-powered tool and a battery-powered floodlight.</p> <p>According to a video posted on the fire district's Facebook page, the station has enough backup equipment to get firefighters through until all the equipment can be replaced.</p> <p>Due to supply chain issues during the pandemic, fire officials said it will take some time for the items to be replaced.</p> <p>The second burglary happened at the Lake McMurray Fire Department in Mount Vernon.</p> <p>Tools were stolen and the building was damaged.</p> <p>The fire department posted on its Facebook page that surveillance video appeared to show at least three people were involved, possibly two men and a woman.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/01 Thieves steal copper wire along highways
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/traffic/traffic-news/wife-theft-causes-i-5-express-lane-ramp-closure-in-seattle/281-68277788-0683-43dd-bacc-f697852aed2d
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — A ramp connected to the Interstate 5 express lanes in Seattle closed Tuesday following a "significant amount of wire theft."</p> <p>The entrance/exit ramp at Ninth Avenue and Pike Street is closed until further notice, according to the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT).</p> <p>"We cannot operate the gates or signage for that ramp without power," WSDOT tweeted. "The express lanes will operate as normal with this exception."</p> <p>The incident is just one of dozens in the past year.</p> <p>Washington State Patrol (WSP) Trooper Joseph Armstrong said thieves have been targeting copper wire on the highways. In the past 13 months, Armstrong said WSP has received 30 calls from the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) about copper wire theft on highways in King County alone.</p> <p>Armstrong said thieves are looking for opportunities to steal copper wire. The metal's price at scrap yards has increased by more than 20% in the past year.</p>

	<p>According to WSDOT's website, thieves target street lights, signals, and storage yards. The thefts "jeopardize public safety by disabling traffic signals, highway lighting, information signs, and other transportation systems," WSDOT notes.</p> <p>In 2007, former Gov. Christine Gregoire signed a bill that increases the penalty against metal thieves.</p> <p>For now, the ramp downtown is closed indefinitely. WSP has no leads of who stole the wire. Armstrong said the Department of Transportation is brain-storming how it can prevent another incident.</p> <p>"They're trying to think of ways to hide it or put it through the system so when we do get everything up and running it's not stolen again," Armstrong said.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/01 Police arrest 4th teen detention escapee
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/crime/stolen-car-found-escaped-teens-echo-glen-childrens-center-snoqualmie/281-e582438b-8d9d-4ce4-b3fd-5dc377089f50
GIST	<p>KENT, Wash. — Police on Tuesday arrested the fourth of five teens who escaped a Snoqualmie detention center in late January and found the car they stole during their getaway.</p> <p>Two King County Sheriff's deputies arrested the teen in Kent around 4 p.m. One teen remains at large.</p> <p>The King County Prosecuting Attorney's Office also filed charges against four of the five teens on Tuesday. Charges include escape in the first degree, kidnapping, unlawful imprisonment, robbery, assault and theft of a motor vehicle.</p> <p>The Kent Police Department located the stolen 2018 Ford Fusion in a park. The department said Tuesday it was there for several days before it was discovered.</p> <p>The five teens, who are between 14 and 17 years old, escaped Echo Glen Children's Center, a medium/maximum security facility, on Jan. 26. The teens allegedly assaulted employees and acquired the keys to the state-owned Fusion.</p> <p>One of the teens, a 15-year-old who was adjudicated of first-degree murder in 2021, was arrested the following day in Kent. Two other detainees were arrested in Kirkland and Kent later that day.</p> <p>Those three teens appeared in court Jan. 28, and a judge found probable cause for offenses, including escape in the first degree, kidnapping in the first degree, unlawful imprisonment, robbery in the first degree and theft of a motor vehicle.</p> <p>The teens were expected to remain in juvenile detention prior to a charging decision.</p> <p>The Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF), which oversees Echo Glen, said it is conducting a review of the incident. DCYF said a team comprised of people outside facility management are working to determine root causes and address risk. That report is expected early this week, according to DCYF.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/01 Officials seek fewer bookings King Co. jail
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/officials-ask-for-fewer-bookings-as-covid-staffing-shortages-worsen-king-county-jail-conditions/
GIST	Facing staff shortages and a surge in coronavirus cases, and describing inhumane conditions in King County jails, public defenders and corrections officers are asking the county to stop booking people awaiting charges on nonviolent felony offenses.

The proposal, which is opposed by the county prosecutor's office, is an effort to further reduce jail populations, which have already fallen significantly since the outbreak of the pandemic nearly two years ago.

At that time, in March 2020, County Executive Dow Constantine ordered corrections officials to stop jailing people accused of most misdemeanors. Average jail populations quickly fell from about 1,900 to around 1,350, where they have remained.

But the omicron-fueled surge in COVID cases has had profound impacts on the county's downtown jail and its jail in Kent, officials said.

Public defenders and corrections officials Tuesday talked about lockdowns forced by staffing shortages and quarantine concerns, resulting in very limited opportunities for the incarcerated to access showers, phones and the commissary.

"Fear that someone may miss a court date is not a reason to keep them locked in a cell for days at a time; no showers, no phone calls, no windows, cold food, but that's where we are right now," said Elbert Aull, a public defender who works at the Maleng Regional Justice Center in Kent. "We've noticed an alarming, alarming decline in our in-custodied clients' personal hygiene."

The proposal would largely prevent the booking of people accused of offenses like burglary, car theft, failure to register as a sex offender and drug dealing.

The county says that as of Tuesday, there are 61 positive coronavirus cases and 63 additional people in quarantine, out of the 1,372 currently in custody. That's down from just two weeks ago when there were nearly 200 positive cases and nearly 250 in quarantine.

Among the county jail system's 900 or so employees, 195 have tested positive in just the last seven weeks, the county said. That's more than tested positive through the first 21 months of the pandemic. The county also has 84 open corrections officer positions and is offering hiring bonuses to try to fill them. King County employees are required to be vaccinated.

Dennis Folk, president of the King County Corrections Guild, said he himself has been off work for the last couple weeks as he recovers from COVID. He described staffing shortages so severe that officers are sleeping in empty cells because they're exhausted from mandatory overtime shifts but have to work another one the next day.

"I ask you are we operating a safe, secure and humane detention facility?" Folk said at a meeting of the Metropolitan King County Council's law and justice committee Tuesday. "I would say you're not."

Corrections and law enforcement officials stressed how much has already been done to reduce the number of people in jail.

John Diaz, director of Adult and Juvenile Detention for King County, said that the number of people booked into King County Jail last year was about half what it was in 2019.

"We significantly reduced the amount of people coming into the jail," Diaz said. "We went almost two years with doing a very good job and then we went through this variant that has just raced through the jail."

King County Prosecuting Attorney Dan Satterberg noted that the reduction in jail population has happened even as the county has seen a surge in shootings and crime.

The vast majority of people in jail, more than 80%, Satterberg said, have either a pending violent offense or other serious charge like a sex offense, domestic violence or a gun charge. An additional 15% or so

have either multiple past convictions, face multiple charges or have a history of failing to appear in court, he said.

A further restriction on booking those accused of nonviolent felonies, Satterberg said, “is going to result in some cases where people are released where you don’t want them released.”

Jail policy is largely set by the county executive. In a prepared statement Tuesday morning, Constantine said they are “committed to doing what’s best for our frontline employees, people in custody, and visitors, including the attorneys and other professionals who serve the jail population.”

He noted that all jail employees are vaccinated, that everyone incarcerated is offered vaccination and that more than 60% of those incarcerated are vaccinated.

Chase Gallagher, a Constantine spokesperson, said they think the current booking policies “strike the correct balance.”

Councilmember Claudia Balducci said she did not favor a change in booking policy even as she had “a lot of concern when I hear about people being locked down 23 hours a day.”

Councilmember Girmay Zahilay said that the steps the county has taken to reduce jail populations have not been enough.

“With all the steps we’ve taken we’re still seeing people locked up in dark cells for 23 hours a day, and that’s scary and that’s inhumane,” Zahilay said.

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HEADLINE	02/01 Pawn shop owner jailed; sold stolen items
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/south-king-county-pawnshop-owner-sentenced-for-trafficking-in-stolen-goods-possession-of-child-pornography/
GIST	<p>An Auburn man was sentenced Tuesday to six years in prison for knowingly selling stolen items from his two pawnshops and for possession of child pornography, the U.S. Attorney’s Office said.</p> <p>Aleksandr Pavlovskiy, 46, owned and operated two pawnshops in South King County between 2013 and 2016, according to charging documents. Pavlovskiy instructed employees at the stores, Thrift Electron in Renton and Innovation Best in Kent, to purchase stolen retail items from delivery drivers and online retailers, according to the statement.</p> <p>Pavlovskiy kept the stolen items in a Kent warehouse and repackaged them for employees to sell on eBay and Amazon, according to the statement from the U.S. Attorney’s Office. Pavlovskiy’s business made between \$1.5 million and \$3.5 million from selling stolen goods.</p> <p>Auburn police began investigating in summer 2018 after a detective noticed the large number of stolen items being sold at Pavlovskiy’s businesses, according to the statement.</p> <p>FBI agents served search warrants at Pavlovskiy’s home and offices in July 2019 and found racks of stolen items being processed for resale at Pavlovskiy’s warehouse, according to charging documents.</p> <p>Law enforcement officials seized some electronic devices for analysis, including Pavlovskiy’s phone, and found images and videos depicting minors under the age of 12 in sexually explicit acts, according to charging documents.</p> <p>FBI agents applied for an additional search warrant in August 2019 to search electronic devices seized at Pavlovskiy’s businesses for child pornography and found over 20,000 images and videos, according to documents.</p>

	<p>Pavlovskiy had used file-sharing software traced to a computer at his Kent warehouse to obtain and share the images and videos, according to documents.</p> <p>Six of the 65 identified sexual abuse victims requested financial restitution to help with the costs of ongoing mental health treatment, the U.S. attorney's statement said. Pavlovskiy was ordered to pay \$2,000 to each of the six. He is required to register as a sex offender once he's released from prison.</p> <p>The defense requested that Pavlovskiy be sentenced to probation and home monitoring because he has no previous criminal history and "was a productive member of society who created jobs for others."</p> <p>However, U.S. District Judge John C. Coughenour ordered Pavlovskiy to serve 24 months for possession of child pornography and 48 months for trafficking in stolen goods.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/01 Tacoma PD search: truck struck protester
SOURCE	https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/crime/article257935038.html
GIST	<p>Tacoma police are searching for a blue pickup that struck and seriously injured a 49-year-old woman last Wednesday at a protest outside the LeMay - America's Car Museum.</p> <p>The woman was standing with a group of protesters on the sidewalk outside the museum near the intersection of Wiley Avenue and East D Street when witnesses say the truck swerved and intentionally struck her. The truck drove off, leaving the woman on the ground with life-threatening injuries.</p> <p>"I saw that this woman was injured and that she was down on the ground and that people were there trying to comfort her," said David Galazin, a protester who witnessed the hit-and-run. "She was screaming in pain."</p> <p>Tacoma Police Department shared a bulletin Monday asking the public to help detectives identify the person responsible. The bulletin included a photo of a small blue pickup similar to the vehicle that hit the woman.</p> <p>Police said the truck could have damage on its passenger side and its side mirror might be missing. A KIRO 7 photographer at the scene caught video of the truck driving away.</p> <p>Those with information can submit tips to Crime Stoppers Tacoma/Pierce County online or text or call 1-800-222-TIPS. Tipsters who provide information that leads to an arrest and charges filed can receive as much as \$1,000 of a cash reward.</p> <p>The protesters were gathered on the sidewalk outside the museum while hundreds of business owners and residents met inside with city and county leaders to discuss issues affecting their businesses, including break-ins, vandalism and homeless encampments. The event was organized by Tacoma Safe, a community group formed last year.</p> <p>Protesters were there in support of people experiencing homelessness in Tacoma and to oppose the idea of a camping ban, which has been supported by members of Tacoma Safe.</p> <p>Galazin, 43, chair of the housing committee for the Tacoma-Pierce County Democratic Socialists of America, was there with his two young children. He said he saw the pickup approach the crowd of about 20 protesters.</p> <p>The truck made an S-shaped curve toward the middle of the lane, then cut sharply toward the crowd, where Galazin said protesters were holding a banner.</p> <p>"I heard and saw the truck accelerate as it did this, and it popped up onto the curb," Galazin said. "From where I could see, I couldn't see who was hit but I could see it drove into the crowd there. Then I saw it cut back into the road, kind of over-correct and speed away."</p>

	<p>A GoFundMe was started by a relative of the injured woman to help with medical bills. According to the fundraiser's page, the woman was initially taken to St. Joseph Medical Center in Tacoma, then was transported to Harborview Medical Center in Seattle due to the extent of her injuries.</p> <p>She suffered a broken pelvis, bleeding from an artery and a concussion along with cuts and bruises. The fundraiser's organizer said the woman had a successful surgery to repair her pelvis. On Tuesday, the fundraiser had raised more than \$40,000.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/01 Oregon gov. pauses clemency for felons
SOURCE	https://www.foxnews.com/us/oregon-democratic-gov-kate-brown-clemency
GIST	<p>Democratic Oregon Gov. Kate Brown has agreed to stop granting clemency for felons between Feb. 2 and March 2, according to a lawyer for a group of murder victims' relatives who are suing the governor over her progressive pardon policy.</p> <p>Kevin Mannix, whose law firm is representing some of the plaintiffs, said the case is expected to be resolved by then.</p> <p>A judge on Monday ordered the governor and state agencies named in the suit to respond by Feb. 16 and scheduled a hearing for Feb. 28.</p> <p>"Our clients, particularly our surviving victims, feel very hopeful and view the Court's order as a good sign that they are finally being heard and that the law will be enforced," Monique DeSpain, another attorney at the Mannix Law Firm, told Fox News Digital Tuesday.</p> <p>In addition to failing to properly notify victims' families, the suit alleges, the governor unlawfully delegated her clemency powers to state agencies, including the Oregon Board of Parole.</p> <p>Gov. Brown's office said it does not comment on pending litigation.</p> <p>The two Oregon district attorneys involved in the lawsuit are Lane County's Patricia Perlow and Linn County's Doug Marteeny. Joining them in the lawsuit are the relatives of three murder victims.</p> <p>Randy Tennant's mother was stabbed to death by her own grandson, Andrew Johnson, when he was 17. He stabbed her in the neck and head 10 times, then stole \$2,000 and went on a shopping spree. He has served seven years of a 25-to-life sentence.</p> <p>Samuel Williams lost his developmentally disabled daughter, Jessica, when three teens stabbed her under Portland's Steel Bridge, "mutilated" her body and lit it on fire. Richard Alsup served 16 years of a 25-to-life sentence. Amy Jones, Williams' surviving daughter, is also a plaintiff in the suit.</p> <p>Melissa Grassl found her partner, Austin French, shot dead in their bedroom on Halloween 2006. His brother, Cayche French, has served 14 years on a 25-to-life sentence.</p> <p>"I just want to know why I, or any of the other victims, don't seem to matter to the governor," Grassl said Monday.</p> <p>The family of Dale Rost III, who was robbed and murdered two days before Christmas in 2005, is not involved in the lawsuit but hopes Brown will deny a clemency request from one of his killers.</p> <p>Justin Olson, Rost's son-in-law, said the governor's month off from pardoning felons is "temporarily good news."</p>

	<p>Lynley Rayburn, who pleaded guilty to her role in Rost's death in 2006, has submitted an application for clemency after serving roughly half of the minimum sentence on her 27.5 years to life sentence for her role in Rost's murder.</p> <p>As Fox News Digital has reported, Rayburn admitted to sneaking up Rost's driveway in the middle of the night two days before Christmas in 2005 with her then-boyfriend Gerard "AJ" Smith, who was high on meth and carrying a rifle.</p> <p>They tied up Rost at gunpoint, ransacked his home and shot him before leaving, according to court documents. Then they stole his car and went for a joyride, using his credit and debit cards.</p> <p>Brown's office said earlier this month she had not yet come to a decision on Rayburn's request for clemency.</p> <p>"My wife wants closure on this, so a denial of clemency would be better than another delayed decision," Olson told Fox News Digital.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/02 Report: officers shot rose 67% in one year
SOURCE	https://www.foxnews.com/us/police-law-enforcement-officers-shot-january
GIST	<p>At least 30 police and law enforcement officers were shot in the month of January – up 67% from the same time last year, new statistics show, as the head of the country's largest police union calls the violence against cops "the worst I have ever seen."</p> <p>Five of the 30 officers shot in the line of duty were killed, and four of the shootings were "ambush-style attacks," the National Fraternal Order of Police said in a Tuesday press release. The union found that five officers were shot and three were killed by the ambush gunfire.</p> <p>"The number of ambush-style attacks listed does not include the countless incidents where an officer was shot at but not struck by gunfire during an ambush-style attack," the FOP report states.</p> <p>The statistics account for the shootings in New York City, where two officers were killed and three more were wounded, and Houston, where four have been shot this month. Three officers were shot in Wisconsin, and three more were wounded in Georgia. Other states that reported officers shot include Nevada, Alabama, Tennessee, Kentucky, Oklahoma, California, Illinois, North Carolina, New Mexico, Montana and Washington State, the group found. An officer was also struck in Washington, D.C.</p> <p>"In just the first month of 2022, we saw the real-life consequences of and felt the immense pain caused by the recent surge in violent crime and the heinous acts of cowardly individuals whose sole motivation is to injure or kill a law enforcement officer," Yoes said. "No officer should be at risk of being violently targeted simply because of the uniform they wear."</p> <p>He said violence toward law enforcement "is skyrocketing" as crime rates also climb.</p> <p>"I have worked in law enforcement for 36 years," he continued, "and the current level of violence targeted at our law enforcement officers is the worst I have ever seen."</p> <p>On Tuesday – the same day the FOP report was released – hundreds, if not thousands, gathered to begin saying their final goodbyes to New York Police Department (NYPD) Officer Wilbert Mora.</p> <p>Mora, a 27-year-old officer with the New York Police Department's 32 Precinct in Harlem, died on Jan. 25 – four days after he was shot in the head by a domestic violence suspect.</p> <p>His partner, Det. Jason Rivera, was also killed. The suspect allegedly used a high-capacity magazine and a handgun, both of which were found to have been stolen.</p>

	Earlier this week, Yoes slammed White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki "for mocking and belittling Americans' concerns about the nation's skyrocketing crime rates and increased violence." The comments were made after Psaki criticized Fox News over its coverage crime coverage.
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HEADLINE	02/01 Virginia college shooting: 2 officers killed
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/active-shooter-bridgewater-college-campus-authorities-called-scene/story?id=82603576
GIST	<p>A campus police officer and a campus safety officer were killed during a shooting at a Virginia college Tuesday afternoon after responding to reports of a "suspicious" person on campus, officials said.</p> <p>Multiple agencies responded to Bridgewater College in Bridgewater following a report of an active shooter around 1:20 p.m. local time, school officials said.</p> <p>The two officers were responding to a call of a "suspicious male individual" on the grounds of the college's Memorial Hall, according to Virginia State Police spokesperson Corinne Geller. After a brief interaction, the suspect opened fire, striking both officers, she said.</p> <p>The suspect fled on foot and was apprehended about a half-hour later off-campus, officials said. Officers followed the suspect after he waded into the North River, onto an island in the river, and he was taken into custody without incident, Geller said.</p> <p>The two officers died from their injuries, Bridgewater spokesperson Logan Boger confirmed to ABC News. They were identified by the college's president as Campus Police Officer John Painter and Campus Safety Officer J.J. Jefferson.</p> <p>"Today our campus community experienced unspeakable tragedy. Two members of the Bridgewater College family were senselessly and violently taken from us," Bridgewater College President David Bushman said in a statement.</p> <p>"This is a sad and dark day for Bridgewater College. I know we all have so many questions and not many answers," he said.</p> <p>The officers were known as the "dynamic duo" and were close friends, Bushman said. Painter was Jefferson's best man in his wedding this year, he said.</p> <p>Virginia Gov. Glenn Youngkin ordered that flags in the state be flown at half-staff Wednesday "in respect and memory of the officers lost."</p> <p>The suspect was identified by authorities as 27-year-old Alexander Wyatt Campbell, of Ashland, Virginia. He has been charged with four felonies: 2 counts of capital murder, 1 count of first-degree murder and 1 count of use of a firearm in the commission of a felony, according to Geller, and is being held without bond at the Rockingham County Jail.</p> <p>Campbell was treated for a non-life-threatening gunshot wound, according to Geller. It is unclear if he was shot by Painter, who was the only one of the two officers armed, or if it was self-inflicted, she said.</p> <p>Multiple firearms "associated with Campbell" were recovered on and off-campus and seized as evidence, Geller said.</p> <p>Virginia State Police did not comment on Campbell's relationship to the college, but Geller said several college employees called 911 after seeing the suspect in and around Memorial Hall. "He was not supposed to be in this particular location," she said.</p>

A motive is still under investigation, and Campbell is the lone suspect, police said. It is unclear if he has an attorney.

Bridgewater Mayor Ted Flory said the community is "shocked by today's senseless violence."

"We are heartbroken by the needless injuries and loss of life. And we are rightly angered at the evil which alighted upon us," he said in a statement. "But even in our grief, we turn our heads and we see the goodness of humanity: police officers running toward the danger, rescue personnel rushing in, and neighbors keeping each other safe."

President Joe Biden also reacted to the incident on Twitter Tuesday night, saying, "Another senseless shooting has taken the lives of two brave officers."

"Jill and I are praying for the families of those lost. Gun violence against law enforcement officers is sickening, and it must end," he added.

Biden plans to travel to New York City on Thursday to discuss gun violence with Mayor Eric Adams, after two NYPD officers were killed in the line of duty last month.

Agencies including the Virginia State Police, the Rockingham County Sheriff's Office and the Harrisonburg Police Department responded to the college following reports of an active shooter. The FBI was also sending agents to the scene, according to a spokesperson.

By 4:33 p.m., the university gave an "all clear" message on its website.

Youngkin said in a statement on social media that he had been briefed on the situation and "will continue to monitor the situation in conjunction with law enforcement."

Bridgewater, a small private liberal arts college, enrolled around 1,500 full-time students as of fall 2021.

Classes were canceled for Wednesday. School officials said they will provide information soon on grief counseling and other forms of support.

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HEADLINE	02/01 Arrests: shooting outside Minnesota school
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/student-dead-critically-injured-shooting-minnesota-school/story?id=82604908
GIST	<p>One student is dead and another is critically injured after being shot on the sidewalk outside of a school Tuesday in Richfield, Minnesota, according to police.</p> <p>The incident took place around noon outside the South Education Center and the suspects fled the scene, Jay Henthorne, chief of Richfield Police, told reporters.</p> <p>The cause of the shooting is still under investigation.</p> <p>Two unidentified suspects were arrested in connection with the shooting after police executed "simultaneous search warrants" at two addresses around 6 p.m. Tuesday, the Richfield Police Department said in an update.</p> <p>A handgun was also recovered, police said.</p> <p>Officers are not looking for any additional suspects at this time.</p> <p>The U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives was on the scene and assisting with the investigation.</p>

	<p>Erica Barlow, who is the principal at nearby Richfield Middle School, sent a letter to parents informing them of the incident.</p> <p>"The officers had weapons drawn and were in bullet-proof vests. It is unlikely that many students witnessed the event, as they were in class at the time," she wrote. "However, it is important that you are aware of the incident in the event that your child hears about it, as some children may be deeply impacted by this type of news."</p>
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